













*T H E   L I T T L E   O N E*



*ALPHONSE DAUDET*



# THE LITTLE ONE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

*DR. V. MELLER*



SUSIL GUPTA

POST BOX 10814 CALCUTTA

*LE PETIT CHOSE 1868*

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*First published in India 1944*

**PUBLISHED BY SUSIL GUPTA, POST BOX  
10814, 22-3C GALIFF STREET, CALCUTTA**

**PRINTED BY P. C. ROY, SRI GOURANGA  
PRESS, 5 CHINTAMANI DAS LANE, CALCUTTA**

A PAUL DALLOZ



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## *Part One*



## I. *THE FACTORY*

I WAS born on the 13th of May, 18—, in a town in Languedoc: it had, like all southern towns a bright sunny sky, lots of dust, a convent of Carmelites and two or three Roman monuments.

My father Monsieur Eysette, was at the time a dealer in silks; he had a large factory on the outskirts of the town and one of its wings he had set apart for a comfortable residence; it was shaded by plane-trees and separated from the workshops by a large garden. There I was born and there I spent my first years—the only happy years of my life. Gratefully my memory has preserved ineffaceable recollections of the garden, the factory and the plane-trees; and when my parents were ruined and I had to part with these, I grieved for them as if they had been living beings.

To begin with, I have to say that my birth brought no good luck to the Eysette family. Old Annie, our cook, has often told me the story of how my father, who was then on a journey, received at the same time the news of my arrival in this world and of the departure of one of his Marseilles clients, with whom vanished forty thousand francs: no wonder if Monsieur Eysette, glad and disconsolate at the same time, did not know whether he should cry over the Marseilles

client's exit or laugh over little Daniel's arrival. You should have cried, my good Monsieur Eysette, you should have cried over both. . . .

I was indeed my parents' star of ill-luck. From the very day of my birth a number of incredible misfortunes befell them. First there was the client in Marseilles, then two outbreaks of fire within a year; then the warpers' strike; after this came the quarrel with uncle Baptiste, then an expensive lawsuit with the dye merchants and finally the Revolution of 18—, which gave us the death-blow.

From that moment on, the factory's life fluttered like a wounded bird. Gradually, the workshops emptied: every week another loom stood still, every month one printing desk less was at work. It was pitiful to see life slowly ebbing away from the mill as from a diseased body—day by day. One day the workshops on the second floor closed down, on another the back yard was condemned: this went on for two years; for two years the factory lay in death agony. At last there was a day when the workers did not come, the factory bell was not rung, the draw-well's wheel ceased to grate, the water stood still and undisturbed in the great ponds where the tissues were washed; and soon the whole factory was empty but for Monsieur and Madame Eysette, old Annie, my brother Jack and myself. Far down at the back, the gatekeeper Colombe stayed to guard the workshops with his son, little Rouget.

It was all over : we were ruined.

I was then six or seven years old. As I had been a delicate and sickly child, my parents would not send me to school. My mother had taught me to read and write, a few words of Spanish and to play two or three tunes on the guitar, which had won me, in the family, the reputation of a little prodigy. Thanks to this system of education, I never set foot outside our home and could witness all details of the Eysette firm's death struggle. I must confess that the sight left me cold. I even found a pleasant side to our financial collapse; now I could romp about the factory as much as I pleased, while before I was allowed to do so only on Sundays. I said gravely to little Rouget: "Now the factory belongs to me; they have given it to me to play in."

And little Rouget believed me. The fool believed anything I told him.

At home, however, not everybody viewed the disaster that had overtaken us with the same gaiety. All of a sudden Monsieur Eysette had become a terrifying man; he was by nature excitable and temperamental: fond of violent exaggeration, fond of shooting, of raising hell. An excellent man at heart, he was quick to strike, quick to come to high words, and apt to engender fear in the people about him. He was not disheartened by his ill-luck; it merely exasperated him. From evening till morning he would be in a terrific rage, finding fault—in the absence of a real

culprit—with everybody and everything, with the sun, the hot breeze, Jack, old Annie, the Revolution—particularly the Revolution! If you had listened to my father, you would have sworn that the Revolution of 18—, which had brought about our ruin, had been aimed especially at us. And indeed, the revolutionaries did not exactly enjoy a reputation for sanctity in the Eysette family. The Lord only knows what we did not say about those gentlemen at the time.... Even to-day, whenever old Daddy Eysette (God bless him and keep him!) feels his attack of gout approaching, he stretches himself painfully in his arm-chair and we hear him say:

“Oh, those revolutionaries!....”

At the time of which I am speaking, Monsieur Eysette did not suffer from gout, and the grief over his ruin had turned him into a terrible man whom nobody dared approach.

He had to be bled twice within a fortnight. Everyone in the house kept silent: we were so frightened. At table we asked for bread in whispers. We did not even dare to cry in his presence. But whenever he turned his back, the whole house was filled with sobs; everybody took part in the general lamentation—my mother, old Annie, my brother Jack; even my big brother, the priest, wept when he came to see us. My mother of course cried over Monsieur Eysette's unhappiness; the Abbé and old Annie cried at the sight of Madame Eysette's tears; as to Jack, he was too

young to understand our misfortunes—he was hardly two years older than myself—and cried out of inner necessity, for the pleasure of the thing.

He was a strange child, my brother Jack; he had the gift of tears. As far back as memory can take me, I see him with reddened eyes and wet cheeks. He cried in the evening and in the morning, in the day and at night, at school, at home and in the street, always and everywhere. If anybody asked; "What is the matter with you?" he sobbed: "Nothing." And strangely enough, it was true. He wept as you blow your nose, only more often. Exasperated, M. Eysette sometimes said to my mother:

"Look at the child! He is ridiculous. He is a river of tears."

And Madame Eysette answered in her soft voice:

"Never mind, dear, he will get over it when he grows up. When I was his age, I was exactly like that."

Jack, however, was growing, and growing fast, but he did not "get over it." On the contrary, the strange boy's peculiar capacity for pouring out torrents of tears without any reason whatever went on increasing every day. Now our parents' affliction came as a great boon to him. At once he seized upon this chance and sobbed to his heart's content for days at a stretch; and nobody cared to ask him, "What is the matter?"



In short, for Jack as for me, our ruin had its pleasant aspects.

As for me, I was very happy. Nobody bothered about me. I used my freedom to play the whole day with Rouget in the deserted workshops, where our steps echoed as they would in a church, and in the empty courtyards already overgrown with grass. Young Rouget, the son of Colombe the gatekeeper, was a stout lad of twelve, strong as an ox, devoted as a dog, stupid as a goose and distinguished by a flaming head of hair, which had earned him his nickname Rouget—Redhead. However, I must tell you at once that for me Rouget was not Rouget. He was by turns my faithful Friday, a tribe of savages, a rebellious crew, anything and anybody. My own name also at those times was not Daniel Eysette. I was a strange man, clothed in skins: Master Crusoe himself, whose adventures I had been given to read. Sweet, foolish times! At night, after supper, I pored over my Robinson Crusoe. I learnt it by heart; in the daytime I played Crusoe and I played with passion. Every single thing about me had its part in the drama. The factory was not a factory any more—it was my desert island. The ponds were the ocean. The garden became a virgin forest. A band of cicadas lived in the plane-trees: they too were actors but did not know it.

Nor did Rouget himself guess the importance of his part. He would have been at a loss if anyone had asked him who or what

Robinson Crusoe was but I must say that he performed his part with the deepest conviction and his imitation of howling savages was unrivalled. Where he learnt it from I cannot guess, but the tremendous roar he somehow fetched from the depths of his chest while wildly waving his thick red mane, would have caused the bravest to tremble. Even I, Robinson Crusoe, sometimes felt my heart failing, and was obliged to say in a whisper:

“Not so loud, Rouget, you frighten me.”

Unfortunately Rouget, who was so good at imitating the howls of savages, was even better at using street-urchin's oaths and at swearing by the name of Our Lord. While playing with him, I had learnt it all and one day, with the family gathered at table, somehow or other a frightful oath escaped my lips. General consternation followed.

“Who taught you this? Where did you hear it?”

It was most calamitous. - M. Eysette immediately spoke of sending me to a Reformatory. My big brother, the Abbé, said that I ought to be sent to Confession first, as I had attained the age of reason. And to Confession I was taken. It was a great event. I had to search my heart for a lot of old sins which had been lying forgotten for seven years. I could not sleep for two nights. Really, there was quite a pocketful of those devilish old sins; I had taken care to put the lesser ones on top, but the others were peeping through and as I knelt in the little

oaken cupboard in the Franciscan church and had to disclose the whole lot of filth to the priest, I felt like dying of fear and confusion.

A great change took place in me. I would not play with Rouget any more; I knew now—so St. Paul had said and the Father repeated it—that the Evil One ceaselessly prowls about us like a lion, "*Quaerens quem devoret*"—seeking whom to devour. Oh, that "*Quaerens quem devoret*," how it impressed me! I also knew that Satan, the shrewd plotter, was able to assume any shape in order to tempt us; and nothing could have shaken my conviction that he had hidden himself in Rouget's skin in order to teach me how to blaspheme.

When I returned to the factory, my first thought was to warn Man Friday that he would have to stay away in future. Unhappy Friday! This edict broke his heart, but he obeyed without a murmur. Occasionally I saw him standing at the door of the lodge, facing the workshops. He looked sad; and when he saw me looking at him, he shook his flaming mane and broke into the most fearful roar. But the louder he roared, the greater the distance I kept. I thought he resembled the notorious prowling Lion, and I shouted,

"Go away! I hate you!"

Rouget obstinately continued to roar for some days. Then one morning his father got weary of the continual roaring and sent him off to roar his way through apprenticeship. I did not see him again.

My enthusiasm for Crusoe suffered no setback. Just then my uncle Baptiste suddenly took a dislike to his parrot and gave it to me. The parrot took Man Friday's place. I installed it in a beautiful cage behind my winter dwelling and there I spent my days, more Robinson Crusoe-like than ever before, face to face with the interesting creature trying to teach it the words: "Robinson, poor Robinson!" Now, can you understand this? The parrot, which Uncle Baptiste had given me to get rid of its ceaseless prattle, obstinately refused to talk from the very moment it belonged to me. No "Poor Robinson," nor anything else—it could not be induced to say a single word. Nevertheless I was very fond of it and looked after it with affectionate care.

Thus we were living, my parrot and I in austere solitude, when one morning an unusual thing happened. I had left my hut at an early hour and was engaged on a journey of exploration through my island, armed to the teeth. Suddenly I saw three or four persons coming towards me; they were talking loudly and vigorously gesticulating. Good God! men on my island! I had just time to conceal myself hurriedly behind a cluster of oleanders, lying flat on my stomach. Then men passed by without seeing me. I thought I could recognize the voice of Colombe the gatekeeper, and this reassured me to some extent; but all the same I left my hiding place when they had gone some way and followed

them from a distance, in order to observe their further movements.

The strangers stayed for a long time on my island. They inspected it in detail, from one end to the other. I saw them enter my caves and sound with their walking-sticks the depths of my oceans. From time to time they stopped and shook their heads. I was terrified lest they should discover my dwelling, what would happen to me then! Fortunately nothing of the sort happened, and after half an hour the men withdrew, without suspecting in the least that the island was inhabited. No sooner had they left than I rushed to lock myself in, in one of my huts and stayed there for the rest of the day, wondering who the men had been and what they had come for.

I was soon to know.

The same evening, at supper, M. Eysette announced in solemn tones that the factory had been sold, and that we were to leave for Lyons in a month's time and would live there in future.

This was a terrible blow. I felt that the heavens were crumbling. The factory was sold! And what about my island, my caves, my huts?

Alas! M. Eysette had sold them all— island, caves and huts, I had to part with everything. How I cried!

For a whole month, while the household was busy packing up crockery and mirrors, I walked through my beloved factory, a sad and lonely figure. You can well imagine that I

was too heart-broken to play. I sat about in corners, looked at every single thing, spoke to objects as if they had been persons. I said to the plane-trees, "Good bye, dear friends!" and to the ponds: "It is all over, we shall not meet again." A tall pomegranate tree stood far down in the garden, the beautiful red blooms opening out to the sun. Sobbing, I said to it: "Give me one of your flowers."

It gave me a flower and I hid it in my bosom as a souvenir. I was so unhappy!

In the midst of all this grief there were however two thoughts which made me smile; first, the thought of boarding a ship; second, that I would be allowed to take my parrot with me. I said to myself that Robinson Crusoe had left his island in rather similar circumstances and felt encouraged.

At last the day of departure came. M. Eysette had been in Lyons for a week—he had gone before with the furniture. So I set forth with Jack, my mother and old Annie. My big brother, the priest, was not leaving, but he accompanied us to the stage-coach at Beaucaire, and so did Colombe, the gate-keeper. Colombe led the way, pushing a large wheel-barrow piled with luggage. Behind him walked my brother, the Abbé, giving his arm to Madame Eysette.

My poor brother, I was never to see you again!

Then came old Annie carrying an enormous blue umbrella and Jack, who was

well-pleased at the journey to Lyons, but was nevertheless in tears. . . . Finally, at the procession's tail, walked Daniel Eysette, solemnly carrying the parrot's cage, and turning round at every step to look back at his beloved factory.

As the caravan moved away, the pomegranate tree rose higher and higher, to look over the wall and see us once more. The branches of the plane-tree waved good-bye. Daniel Eysette, very much moved, threw them furtive kisses with his finger-tips.

I left my island on the 30th September 18—.

## II. *THE COCKROACHES*

OH memories of childhood, how deeply you are rooted in my soul! The journey on the river Rhone—I feel it was but yesterday. I can still see the ship, the passengers, the crew; I can hear the propellers' noise and the whistle of the engine. The Captain's name was Geniés, the boatswain's Montélimart. These are things that one does not forget.

The voyage lasted three days and I spent them on the deck, descending to the cabin only to eat and to sleep. The rest of the time I spent at the far end of the ship, near the anchor. There was a large bell which was rung when we entered a port. I sat near this

bell, amidst piles of rope; I placed the parrot's cage between my feet and looked at the world. The Rhone was so wide that the banks were hardly visible. I wished that it had been even larger and was called the Sea! The sun was smiling on the green waters. Great barges floated past. Bargemen forded the river on mules, singing. Sometimes we sailed past a green island, densely overgrown with rushes and willows.

"Oh, a desert island!" I said to myself, devouring it with my eyes.

Towards the end of the third day I thought we were going to have a squall. The heavens suddenly darkened, dense mists floated over the river, a large lantern had been lit in the prow; to tell you the truth, I began to feel slightly anxious at these signs.

Somebody said near me:

"Here we are in Lyons."

At the same time the big bell began ringing: we were in Lyons.

Behind the curtain of mist I saw dim lights appear on the banks; we passed under a bridge, then under a second one, the huge funnel of the ship bent over each time to belch clouds of black smoke which made me cough. A frightful confusion prevailed on board, Passengers were looking for their luggage, sailors were rolling barrels, swearing in the dark. It was raining.

I hastened to join my mother, Jack and old Annie at the other end of the steamer; there the four of us stood clinging together



under Annie's big umbrella, while the ship approached the quay and people began to go ashore.

If M. Eysette had not come to deliver us, I firmly believe that we should never have moved.

He came towards us, groping his way through the dark and shouting:

"Who goes there? Who goes there?"

"Friends!" we answered the well-known call, all the four of us, and with unspeakable joy and relief. Quickly M. Eysette kissed us, gave one hand to my brother, the other to me, telling the women to follow him and off we went. By Jove, what a man!

We advanced with difficulty: it was pitch dark, the deck was slippery, at every step we bumped against packing-cases. Suddenly from the farthest end of the steamer a shrill and piteous voice was heard.

"Robinson!" it was crying, "Robinson!"

"Oh, my God!" said I and tried to free my hand from my father's grip; thinking that I had slipped he held it tighter still.

"Robinson! poor Robinson!" the voice repeated, shriller and more desperate.

I made another attempt to disengage my hand.

"My parrot," I shouted, "my parrot!"

"So it does talk after all?" said Jack.

Did it talk? I should say it did: you could hear it from a mile. In my confusion I had left it, in the prow, near the anchor, and from there it was calling me with all

its strength. "Robinson! Robinson! Poor Robinson!"

Unfortunately we were too far. The Captain was shouting:

"Hurry up!"

"We shall come and fetch it to-morrow," said M. Eysette. "Nothing is lost on board."

And he dragged me away, heedless of my tears. Worse luck! next day we sent for the parrot and it could not be found. Imagine my despair: no Man Friday! no parrot! Robinson Crusoe had become impossible. And besides, could a desert island be created, even with the best of wills, on the fourth floor of a dirty and damp house in Lantern Street?

Oh, what a terrible house! I shall keep seeing it all my life: the staircase was sticky with filth; the courtyard like the pit; the doorkeeper, who was a cobbler, had his booth next to the water pump. Everything was disgusting.

The evening after our arrival, while old Annie was installing herself in her kitchen, we heard a distressful cry:

"Cockroaches, cockroaches!"

We ran to her. What a sight! The kitchen was full of ugly insects; they were on the kitchen table, on the walls, in the drawers, on the sideboard, they were everywhere. Wherever we stepped, we crushed some of them. Pah! Annie had killed a number; but the more she killed, the more they came. They entered through the hole in the sink—we stopped the hole; but next day they

returned by some other route, goodness knows how. We had to keep a cat who killed them and every night a frightful massacre took place in the kitchen.

From the very first evening the cockroaches made me hate Lyons. The next day was even worse; we had to alter our habits, even the hours of meals were changed. The very loaves were of different shape from those at home; they were called "coronets." What a name!

When old Annie went to the butcher's and asked for a "carbonade",<sup>1</sup> the butcher laughed in her face, the barbarian did not know what it was! All this was very annoying.

As a Sunday recreation the family used to go for a walk on the Rhone Quay, carrying umbrellas. Instinctively we used to walk towards the south, in the direction of Perrache.

"It makes me feel nearer to our home-town," my mother used to say: she was pining for it even more than I.

These family excursions were depressing affairs with Monsieur Eysette grumbling. Jack always in tears, and I walking behind them, all the time; somehow I felt ashamed in the streets; probably because we were poor.

After a month, old Annie fell ill. The fog was killing her; she had to be sent back to the South. The poor old girl was passionately

<sup>1</sup> "Carbonade"—a dish of meat roasted over a coal-fire.  
(Translator's note).

fond of my mother and could not make up her mind to leave us. She begged to be allowed to stay with us and promised not to die. At last she had to be embarked by force. She arrived in the South and got married out of despair.

No servant was engaged after Annie's departure. This was, in my view, the acme of misery. The doorkeeper's wife used to come up to do the rough housework; the kitchen fire scorched my mother's lovely white hands, that I loved to kiss; and it was Jack who went marketing. A large basket was hung over his arm and he was told "to buy such and such things."

He bought such things very well, crying all the time, of course.

Poor Jack! He was not happy either. Monsieur Eysette, exasperated by his eternal tears, had taken a dislike to him and was even boxing his ears.

"Jack, you are an ass!" we could hear him all day long. "Jack, you are an idiot!"

As a matter of fact, the unhappy Jack lost all courage in his father's presence. The efforts he made to restrain his tears made him look ugly. "Monsieur Eysette brought him bad-luck. Take for instance the case of the pitcher :

One evening as the family is about to sit down to dinner, we find that there is not a drop of water in the house.

"If you like I shall go and fetch water," says Jack, the good boy. And he takes the

pitcher—a large stone pitcher. Monsieur Eysette shrugs his shoulders :

“ If Jack is going, the pitcher is as good as broken.”

“ Do you hear, Jack,” comes Madame Eysette’s gentle voice, “ do not break it, be careful.”

Monsieur Eysette resumes :

“ Oh well, it is useless to tell him not to break it, he will break it.”

Now Jack’s tearful voice is heard :

“ But why do you want me to break it?”

“ I do not want you to break it,” answers M. Eysette in a tone which admits of no reply, “ I am telling you that you *will* break it.”

Jack does not reply; he takes the pitcher with feverish hands and makes an abrupt exit. There is a look on his face which says :

“ I shall break it, shall I? Well, we are going to see!”

Five minutes, ten minutes pass. . . . Jack does not return. Madame Eysette begins to worry :

“ I do hope nothing has happened to him!”

“ Rubbish! what could happen?” says M. Eysette crossly. “ He has broken the pitcher and dare not come home.”

But all the same he gets up at once—despite his surly air he was the best of men—and opens the door to go and look for Jack. He does not have to go far : Jack is there, on the landing, facing the door, silent, petrified :

his hands are empty. He pales at the sight of M. Eysette and announces in a heart-rending, very faint voice:

"I have broken it. . . ."

And so he had.

This is the story which in the archives of the Eysette family goes under the name of the "Scene of the Pitcher."

We had been in Lyons for two months when our parents began to think of our studies. My father would have liked to send us to College<sup>1</sup>, but he could not afford it.

"Could we not send them to a choir-boys' school?" asked Madame Eysette, "they seem to be quite good."

The idea pleased my father, and the church of Saint-Nizier being the nearest, we were sent to join the choir boys of Saint Nizier.

We had great fun at Saint Nizier's: instead of having to cram our heads with Latin and Greek, as in other institutions, we were taught how to serve Mass at the right and left of the altar, to sing the anthems, to make genuflexions, and to swing the censer elegantly, which is a difficult task. A few hours were devoted daily to declensions and to the Epitome, but this was only a subsidiary feature: we were there for the service of the church, primarily.

At least once a week Abbé Micou would

<sup>1</sup> "College"—In France, a municipal or Government-aided public boarding school. (*Translator's note*).

tell us between two pinches of snuff, and with a solemn air :

"To-morrow, gentlemen, no morning lessons! We are doing a funeral."

O joy! We were doing a funeral. Then there were baptisms, weddings, a visit from the Bishop, the Last Sacraments being taken to a sick person. How proud we were when we were allowed to accompany the priest carrying Viaticum! He walked under a small canopy of red velvet, carrying the Host and the Holy Oils. Two choir-boys supported the canopy, two others escorted it carrying large gilded tallow-lamps. A fifth boy walked in front, swinging a rattle. Usually I held this office. As the procession approached, men took off their hats, and women made the sign of the Cross. When we passed a guard-house the sentry called out: "To arms!" and soldiers came running and lined up.

"Present.... arms!" said the officer.

Up went the muskets with a thud, the drum beat a salute. I rang my rattle three times, as for the Sanctus, and we went on.

Each of us had in a small cupboard, a complete clerical outfit: a black cassock with a long train, an alb, a stiffly starched surplice, black silken stockings, two calottes—one of cloth, the other of velvet, neck bands edged with small white pearls: in short, everything that was needed.

This costume, it seems, suited me very well.

"He does look sweet, dressed up like this," said Madame Eysette.

But I was very short, to my great chagrin. Just imagine that standing on tip-toe I could not stretch myself higher than Monsieur Caduffe's—our beadle's—white stockings; and in addition! I was very thin too. Once, when carrying the Gospel at Mass, the large book proved too heavy for me: it slipped, and I went down with it, full length on the altar steps. The desk was broken, the service had to be interrupted. What a scandal! Apart from the slight inconvenience due to my small stature, I was well content with my lot, and often we told so to each other, Jack and I, while going to bed at night:

"We *are* having a good time at the choir school."

Unfortunately we did not stay there long. A friend of our family, who was Rector of a Southern University, wrote to my father that if he wanted to send one of his sons to the Lyons College, as a day-scholar, a scholarship might be obtained.

"I shall send Daniel," said my father.

"And what about Jack?" asked my mother.

"Oh, Jack! He will stay with me: he will be very useful. I have noticed that he has a liking for commerce: we shall make a merchant of him."

To tell you the truth, I cannot think how Monsieur Eysette had come to observe Jack's liking for commerce. In those days the poor



boy had a liking only for crying and had he been consulted... , but he was not consulted, nor was I.

The first thing to strike me when I arrived at school was the fact that I was the only boy who wore a blouse. In Lyons children of the rich do not wear blouses: only street urchins do. And I was dressed in a blouse, a little blouse with a check pattern, dating from factory days; and of course looked like a street urchin; so when I entered the class-room, the pupils sneered:

"Look at him! He wears a blouse!"

The teacher made a face and immediately formed a dislike for me. From that moment on, he never addressed me but with a contemptuous look, hardly deigning to move his lips. He never called me by name; always it was:

"Hey! you, there, little Thingummy."

Yet I had told him times without number that my name was Daniel Ey-set-te. At last the boys nicknamed me "little Thingummy" and the name stuck.

It was not the blouse alone that distinguished me from the other children. The others had beautiful satchels of yellow leather, nice-smelling box-wood inkstands, cardboard-covered copybooks, new books with plenty of footnotes; my books were mouldy old things bought at the stalls on the Quay, with faded yellow pages and a rancid smell. Their covers were in tatters, sometimes whole pages were missing. Jack worked hard with

cardboard and glue to bind them for me : but he invariably used too much glue which made the books smelly. He had also made me a satchel with innumerable pockets, very useful indeed—but always too much glue. To work with paste and cardboard had become a necessity for Jack, a passionate urge, like his tears. He had a row of little glue-pots permanently standing near the fire, and whenever he could escape from the store for a minute he was pasting, binding, gluing. For the rest of the time he carried parcels, wrote under dictation, went shopping—Commerce, in one word.

As to me, I realised that a person who pays no school fees, who wears a blouse and whose name is little Thingummy must do double the work done by others in order to be their equal; and, upon my word! little Thingummy set himself to work with his whole heart.

Brave little Thingummy! I can see him sitting at his desk, in winter : there is no fire in his room, and he has wrapped a blanket round his legs. An icy rain is beating against the widow-panes. From the store Monsieur Eysette's voice is heard dictating to Jack :

“ We have received your letter of the 8th instant . . . . ”

And Jack's tearful voice repeating, .

“ We have received your letter of the 8th instant . . . . ”

Sometimes the door would open noise-

lessly: it was Madame Eysette. On tip-toe she comes up to little Thingummy. Pst!

"You are working?" she whispers.

"Yes, mother."

"Are you not cold?"

"Oh, no."

Little Thingummy is lying. he is very cold indeed.

Then Madame Eysette would seat herself near him with her knitting and stay there for many hours, counting the stitches in an undertone and sighing deeply from time to time.

Poor Madame Eysette! She was still longing for her beloved home-town—she had given up the hope of seeing it ever again... Alas! unfortunately for her and for all of us, she was to return there but too soon.

### III. "HE IS DEAD: PRAY FOR HIM."

It was a Monday in the month of July.

I had yielded to the temptation of playing baseball after school and when I decided to go home it was much later than I should have liked. I ran from Terreaux Square to Lantern Street without stopping, my books dangling from my belt and my cap held between my teeth. Being terribly afraid of my father, I stopped for a minute on the staircase, in order to recover my breath—just

as long as it took me to invent an explanation for my late return. Thereupon I boldly rang the bell.

Monsieur Eysette himself opened the door.

"How late you are!" he said.

Trembling with fear I began to recite my tale; but the dear man did not let me finish it. He took me in his arms and held me for a long time silently against his breast.

I had expected a sharp rebuke at the best, and this reception surprised me. At first I thought that the Father from Saint Nizier's was coming to dinner and on such days we were not scolded, as I knew by experience. But when I entered the dining room I saw at once that I had been mistaken. There were only two places laid on the table—my father's and mine.

"Where is Mother : And Jack?" I asked, astonished.

M. Eysette replied in a low voice, quite unusual with him :

"Your mother and Jack have left, Daniel. Your brother, the Abbé, is very ill."

Then, seeing that I had grown quite pale, he tried to reassure me, adding almost cheerfully :

"Of course I don't mean that he is really very ill; we have had a letter saying that he was in bed. You know what your mother is : she would go, of course, and, I have given her Jack as an escort...I believe it is nothing! Now sit down and let us eat, I am starving."

I sat down without a word, but my heart

grew heavy at the thought that my big brother was very ill and I was at great pains to restrain my tears. We had a sad dinner, sitting face to face without speaking a word. My father ate quickly, drank in great gulps, then suddenly stopped, lost in thought. As for me, I sat at the end of the table, motionless, in a stupor. I remembered the beautiful stories the Abbé used to tell me when he came to the factory; I also recalled the day of his first Mass, attended by the entire family, and how handsome he looked when he turned to face us with open arms and said "Dominus Vobiscum" in a voice so gentle that Madame Eysette wept for joy. In my imagination I saw him lying ill in bed—and very ill indeed, I knew it and to increase my suffering a voice cried from within my heart: "It is your fault! God is punishing you! You should have come straight home! You should not have lied!" Faced with the terrible thought that God would punish him by letting his brother die, little Thingummy vowed, stricken with despair: "Never, never again! shall I play games after school!"

Dinner came to an end; the lamp was lit and the vigil began. M. Eysette had placed his large business books on the table, among the remains of our desert, and was calculating aloud. Finet the cat, killer of cockroaches, prowled about the table, mewling sadly; I was leaning out of the open window.

It was dark, heavy night.....People were laughing and chatting in front of their

doors, the drums of Fort Loyasse beat in the distance. I remained at the window for some time, thinking sad thoughts and vaguely looking out into the night, when the door-bell was violently rung which made me start away from the window. I looked at my father in consternation and it seemed to me that the shiver of pain and terror I felt coursing over me passed over his face also. He too had been frightened by the bell.

"Somebody is ringing" he said in quite a low voice.

"Stay, father! I am going."

And I ran to the door.

A man was on the threshold. I saw him dimly through the shadows, holding out something that I hesitated to take.

"A telegram," he said.

"A telegram, good Lord! What for?"

Trembling, I took it, and was already shutting the door; but the man put his foot against it and said coldly.

"You will have to sign."

I had to sign? I did not know it—it was the first telegram I had received.

"What is it, Daniel?" cried M. Eysette.

"Nothing, father," I replied. "It is only a beggar."

I made a sign to the man to wait for me, ran to my room and groped for pen and ink. Then I came back.

"Sign here," said the man.

Little Thingummy signed with a shaking hand, by the light of the staircase lamp; then

he closed the door and came back, hiding the telegram under his blouse.

Yes, I held you safely, well concealed under my blouse, message of mourning! I did not want my father to see you; for I knew already that you had come to announce a terrible thing, and when I opened you, you held no news for me, did you hear me, telegram? You had no news for me but that which my heart had already guessed.

"Was it a beggar?" my father asked, looking at me.

I answered without blushing:

"It was a beggar."

And I returned to the window, to calm his suspicions.

There I stayed for some time, motionless, speechless, clutching the paper which seemed to burn my breast.

Now and again I tried, to reason with myself, to take courage. I told myself: "Who knows? Perhaps it is good news. Perhaps it says that he has recovered. Yet I felt that it was not true, that I was lying to myself, that the telegram would not say my brother had recovered.

At last I gather sufficient strength to go to my room and find out the truth. I left the dining-room slowly, as if for nothing in particular; but once in my room, what feverish haste to light my lamp! And how my hands trembled as they tore open the message of death! And how burning were the tears I shed upon it when it was opened. I read it

twenty times, in the vain hope that I had been mistaken. Poor me! I might read and re-read it, turn it in every way, it would never tell me anything but what it had told me from the first, what I knew it would say: "He is dead. Pray for him."

I do not know how long I remained standing there, crying over the telegram. I remember that my eyes were smarting and that I bathed my face with plenty of water before leaving my room. Then I returned to the dining room, holding the thrice accursed message crushed in my small fist.

And now, how to break the terrible news to my father? What childish, ridiculous impulse had made me keep it from him? Sooner or later, he had to know it. How foolish I had been! Had I gone straight to him when the telegram arrived, we should have opened it together and by now the first shock would have been over.

Thus talking to myself, I approached the table and sat down close beside M. Eyesette. The poor man had shut his books and was playing with Finet, tickling the cat's white nose with the feather of his quill. It wrung my heart to see him playing like this. I saw his kindly face, half lit by the lamp, brighten and laugh now and then—and I wanted to tell him: "Please do not laugh; I beg of you, do not laugh."

There I sat, looking at him sadly: and M. Eyesette lifted his head. Our eyes met and I do not know what he saw in mine; but I



know that suddenly his face was distorted, and a loud cry broke from his lips, and he asked in a voice which hurt my very soul: "He is dead, is he not?"—The telegram slipped from my fingers, while I fell sobbing into his arms and both of us wept for a long, long time, passionately clinging to each other, while at our feet Finet the cat played with the telegram, the awful telegram, the cause of our grief.

Believe me, I am telling no lie; all this happened a long time ago; it is ages since he was laid to rest, my dear Abbé, whom I loved so well; yet even to-day, if I receive a telegram, I cannot open it without a shudder. I feel that I shall read again that "he is dead," that I must "pray for him."

#### IV. *THE RED COPYBOOK*

WE find in old Missal's naïve illuminations representing Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows that she has a deep furrow on each cheek, which look like scars as if traced there by the artist so as to tell us: "See how she has wept!" Such furrows, the path of tears—I had seen on Madame Eysette's lean face, when she returned to Lyon after burying her son.

Poor mother! since that day she had never smiled. Her dress was always black,

her features sorrowful. She clothed her body and her soul in deep mourning and would never discard it again. For the rest there was no change in the house, only it had grown a little more dismal, that was all. The parish priest of St Nizier's said a few Masses to rest our Abbé's soul; two black suits were made for the children, cut out of their father's old cloak; and life, our sad life, resumed its course.

Our dear Abbé had been dead for some time when one evening as we were going to retire, I saw, to my great astonishment, that Jack closed the door of our room, turned the key twice in the lock and carefully stopped the chinks in the door. Having done this he came towards me with a tremendously solemn and mysterious air.

Now, I have to tell you that an extraordinary change had taken place in friend Jack's ways since his return from the South. First of all, unbelievable though it may seem, Jack had practically stopped crying and his blind love for cardboard and glue also had almost disappeared. The little glue-pots did go to the fire now and then, but the old spirit was not there. If you wanted a new satchel now, you had to go down on your knees for it. Incredible things were happening: a hat-box ordered by Madame Eysette was being manufactured for eight days... The others had not noticed anything, but I could see that something was happening to Jack. Several times I had surprised him alone in the store,

gesticulating and talking to himself. He did not sleep at night and I would hear him muttering, then suddenly he would jump up from his bed and measure the room with great strides. These certainly were not normal signs and I was frightened to think of them. I believed Jack was going crazy.

When I saw him securely locking the door, the idea of madness at once popped up in my head and made me start with fright; poor Jack! he did not notice it; he gravely took my hand in his and said :

"Daniel, I am going to confide in you : but you must promise never to tell anyone."

I understood at once that Jack was not crazy and answered without hesitation :

"I swear it!"

"Good! Listen : I am writing a poem, a great poem."

"Jack! you, writing a poem?"

For answer Jack drew from under his vest an enormous red copybook, bound by himself. It bore the title, written in Jack's best hand :

RELIGION! RELIGION!

POEMS IN TWELVE CANTOS

*By Eysette (Jack)*

The thing was so big that I felt dizzy.

Just think of it : Jack, my brother Jack, a boy of twelve, Jack of the tears, Jack of the little glue-pots, was writing : "RELIGION, RELIGION! POEMS IN TWELVE CANTOS."

And nobody had an inkling of it! They continued to send him to the grocer's with a

basket on his arm! And his father shouting louder than ever: "Jack, you ass!"

Good old Eysette (Jack)! How gladly I should have embraced you—if I had dared. But I did not—just think of it: "RELIGION! RELIGION! POEMS IN TWELVE CANTOS".... Honesty however compels me to state that the Poem in Twelve Cantos was far from being completed.. I believe that actually only four verses of the First Canto had been composed; but you know that with writings of this style the preparatory work is the most difficult and, as Eysette (Jack) rightly said: "Now that I have got my first four verses, the rest is nothing: just a question of time."<sup>1</sup>

But Eysette (Jack) never brought forth that "rest" which was only a question of time. Certain things cannot be helped and poems too have to obey Destiny. It would appear that "RELIGION! RELIGION! POEMS IN TWELVE CANTOS" was just fated not to have twelve Cantos at all. The poet racked his brains but he never got beyond the first four lines: such was the will of Fate. Finally the unhappy boy lost his patience, sent the poem to the devil and dismissed his Muse (it was then still the fashion to speak of the Muses). On the same day tears retook possession of

<sup>1</sup> Here are the four verses as I saw them on that memorable night, written in beautiful round hand on the first page of the red copybook.

"Religion, oh, Religion!  
Oh Mysterious Call  
Heard by One and All.  
Compassion, oh Compassion!"

him and the little glue-pots re-appeared at the fire . . . . And what happened to the red copy-book? Oh, that had its fate too.

Jack said to me:

"I give it to you: write in it whatever you like."

Can you guess what I wrote in it? My poems, little Thingummy's poems! I had caught the disease from Jack.

And now, if you please, dear reader, while little Thingummy is busy picking rhymes, we shall step with one long stride over four or five years of his life. I am in haste to take you over to the spring of 18..., which is still vividly remembered by the Eysette family—all families have some memorable dates of this kind.

Besides, the reader will lose nothing by passing silently over that bit of my life. It was always the same song—of poverty and tears: business is bad, the rent is not paid, creditors demand their money, mother's diamonds are sold, the silver plates go to the pawnshop, the bedsheets have holes, the trousers have to be patched; continuous privations, daily humiliations; the permanent problem: "How shall we manage to-morrow?"—the insolently ringing bell that announces the bailiff; the doorkeeper smiling as we pass and unpaid bills and debts without end.

So here we are in the year 18 . . . .

In that year little Thingummy was to graduate from the Philosophy class.

He was, if I remember rightly, a rather conceited young man, who held quite high opinions of himself as a philosopher and also as a poet. He was, by the way, a tiny little fellow and had not a single hair on his chin.

Well, one morning the great philosopher and little Thingummy was just preparing to go to school, when M. Eysette Senior called him into the store and growled at him as soon as he entered :

"Daniel, throw away your books, you are not going to school any more."

And, having spoken, M. Eysette Senior began to pace the store with long strides. He appeared very much moved; and so was little Thingummy. After a long silence, M. Eysette spoke again :

"My boy," he said, "I have bad news for you; very bad news indeed. The four of us shall have to separate and I shall tell you why."

At this point, a heart-breaking sob was heard from behind the half-open door.

"Jack, you are an ass!" cried M. Eysette without looking round.

Then he resumed :

"Six years ago, when we were ruined by the revolutionaries and came to Lyons, I had to make a fresh start and hoped to succeed by means of hard work. But the devil seems to have taken a hand in it for I have only succeeded in plunging ourselves up to the neck in debts and misery, and now we are hopelessly involved. There is but one way

out: now that you two are grown-up, we must sell whatever little is left, and separate, each of us to struggle for himself."

Another sob from the invisible Jack interrupted M. Eysette, but he himself was so deeply moved that he forgot to be angry. He only made a sign to Daniel to close the door, and resumed:

"This is what I have decided: until further instructions your mother is going to live with her brother, uncle Baptiste, in the South. Jack will stay in Lyon: I have found a modest job for him at the pawn-office. I shall work as a commercial traveller for the Wine Growers' Association. As to you, my poor child, you too will have to earn your bread. Just now I have received a letter from the Rector: he offers you the post of an usher in a College. Here, read it for yourself."

Little Thingummy took the letter.

"It seems," he said, reading it, "that there is not much time left."

"You will have to leave to-morrow."

"Very well, I shall go."

And little Thingummy folded the letter and gave it back to his father; his hand was steady. As you see, he was a great philosopher.

At this point, Madame Eysette entered with Jack timidly following. Both went up to little Thingummy and without saying a word, kissed him; they had known since last night what was impending.

"Better get busy packing!" growled

M. Eysette. He will leave by the morning boat, to-morrow."

Madame Eysette heaved a deep sigh, Jack emitted a slight sob, and no more was said.

Our family had become accustomed to misery.

On the morrow of this memorable day the whole family escorted little Thingummy to the steamer. By a strange coincidence it was the same boat which, six years earlier, had brought the Eysette family to Lyon. There were both Captain Geniés, and boatswain Montélimart! Naturally we recalled Annie's umbrella, Robinson's parrot and other episodes of our last landing. These memories somewhat brightened the sadness of our parting and brought the shadow of a smile to Madame Eysette's lips.

Suddenly the ship's bell rang: I had to go.

Little Thingummy, breaking away from the arms which were clasping him, bravely crossed the footbridge.

"Behave yourself!" shouted his father.

"Take care of yourself!" begged his mother.

Jack too wanted to say something, but he could not speak—he was dissolved in tears.

But little Thingummy did not cry. He was a great philosopher, as I have had the honour to tell you, and great philosophers never give way to emotions.



He loved them, nevertheless. God only knows how fondly he loved them—those dear people he had left behind in the fog. God only knows that he would have willingly given his life for them... but of course on the other hand, there was the pleasure of leaving Lyon, the stir and bustle on board, the excitement of the journey, the proud feeling of being a man—a free man, and master of himself, one who travels alone and earns his living; it was an intoxicating potion which prevented little Thingummy from thinking as he should have, of his three dear ones, left on the Rhone quay, crying.

*They* were not philosophers, none of the three. Anxiously, lovingly, their gaze followed the steamer's laboured progress; and the white plume of smoke was no larger than a swallow over the horizon when they were still there, waving and calling: "Good bye! Good bye!"

Meanwhile, Master Philosopher was walking up and down the deck, his hands in his pockets, his head held high. He whistled, he spat out into the water, he stared at the ladies, he inspected the sailors' work, and moved ponderously with shoulders thrown back like a big man: he was feeling handsome. Before even reaching Vienne, he had informed Boatswain Montélimart and his two scullions that he was a University man and earned a very good salary... His audience congratulated him and he felt very proud.

Once, as our philosopher was walking the deck from stem to stern, it happened that his foot knocked against a pile of ropes, in the stem, near the big bell; there six years ago Robinson Crusoe had sat for many hours, his parrot between his feet. He laughed a good deal over the pile of ropes and blushed a little.

"How ridiculous I was," he thought, "to drag after me that huge blue cage, and that fantastic bird..."

Poor philosopher! Little he knew that he was condemned to walk through life, thus ridiculously dragging after him the blue cage—painted in the colour of Illusion, and the green parrot—clad in the colour of Hope...

Alas! to this very hour in which I am writing, the unhappy boy has been carrying his big blue cage. But day by day the sky-coloured varnish is cracking and fading, and the green parrot has lost most of his feathers, poor creature!

Arrived in his home-town, little Thingummy's first action was to wait upon the Rector, whose quarters were in the Academy.

The Rector, Eysette Senior's friend, was a fine-looking old man, lean and alert, with nothing of the pedant about him. He received young Eysette with great benevolence. However, when he was shown into the study, the good old man could not conceal his astonishment.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, "how small he is!"

As a matter of fact, little Thingummy

was ridiculously short—and such a baby-face too.

The Rector's exclamation gave him a terrible shock. "They will not accept me," he thought and began to tremble all over.

Fortunately, the Rector continued, as if he had guessed what was going on in the small frightened brain :

"Come here, my boy!... So you are going to be a college usher? At your age, and with your size and looks you will find it a harder profession than it is for others. But since it is unavoidable, since you have to work for your living, my dear boy, we shall do our best for you. In the beginning, you will not go to a large barrack of a College: I am going to send you to a public school a few miles away, at Sarlande, right in the mountains. There you will serve your apprenticeship to manhood, and also learn the ropes of the profession; first you will become a man, grow a beard, and afterwards, we shall see!"

While he was talking, the Rector wrote a letter to the Principal of Sarlande College, introducing his protégé. This he gave to little Thingummy, telling him to leave the same day. Thereupon he gave the boy some good advice and dismissed him with a friendly slap on the cheek, promising to keep him in mind.

Now we see little Thingummy, happy and content, tumble down the venerable Academy

steps four at a time and go off in a breathless hurry to reserve his seat on the stage-coach.

The stage-coach for Sarlande did not leave till the afternoon: four more hours to wait! This gives him an opportunity to parade on the sunny Esplanade and show himself to his countrymen. Thus the first duty having been performed, he thinks of getting some food and starts out in quest of a "Cabaret" within means of his purse. Right opposite the barracks he finds a neat little tavern, bright and cleanly, with a beautiful new signboard: "Journeyman's Rest."

"Just the thing for me" thinks little Thingummy, and after a few minutes' hesitation, for this is the first time he visits a restaurant,—he resolutely opens the door.

The tavern is empty. It has whitewashed walls, a few oaken tables and in a corner the journeymen's long leather-tipped canes with their coloured ribbons; behind the counter a stout man is snoring, his face hidden by a newspaper.

"Hello! somebody!" calls little Thingummy, knocking with his fist on a table, like an old 'haunter' of taverns.

The stout man at the counter does not wake up at so little; but the housewife comes bustling from the back-shop. On seeing the new customer, whom the Angel of Chance has led to her door, she screams:

"Mercy! Master Daniel!"

"Annie, dear old Annie!" answers little Thingummy and he flies into her arms.

It is indeed old Annie, formerly maid-of-all-work in the Eysette household, now owner of a tavern, mother of travelling journeymen, and wife to John Peyrol, the stout fellow who is still snoring in his corner. You ought to see old Annie's happiness at meeting Master Daniel again! You ought to see her kissing and embracing him, smothering him in her arms!

In the midst of these effusions the man at the counter wakes up. He is at first slightly astonished to see the warm welcome his wife is extending to a young stranger; but when he learns that the stranger is Monsieur Daniel Eysette in person, John Peyrol blushes with pleasure and is full of attention to his illustrious guest.

"Have you had your breakfast, Master Daniel?"

"Indeed, I have not, my dear Peyrol... that was why I came here."

Merciful God! Master Daniel has had no breakfast! Old Annie flies to the kitchen: John Peyrol rushes to the cellar—a royal cellar, as the journeymen say.

The table is laid in the twinkling of an eye; little Thingummy has only to sit down and start work. At his left, Annie cuts bread for sippets, to eat his eggs with—freshly laid eggs, white, creamy, appetizing. At his right, Peyrol pours out the wine, an old Château-Neuf, which gleams like a handful of rubies in the glass.

Little Thingummy is very happy; he

drinks like a Knight Templar, eats like a Knight Hospitaller, and between two mouthfuls finds time to report that he has just been given a job by the University, which will enable him to earn an honourable livelihood. You should see his proud air as he says: "An honourable livelihood." Old Annie feels faint with admiration.

John Peyrol is less enthusiastic. For him it is only natural that Master Daniel should earn his bread, as he is old enough to do so. When John Peyrol was Master Daniel's age, he had been roaming the world for four or five years and did not cost his parents a single penny, on the contrary...

But the worthy man keeps his reflections to himself. He would not dream of comparing Daniel Eysette to John Peyrol! Annie would never stand it.

Meanwhile, little Thingummy's spirits are rising. He eats and drinks, his eyes sparkle, his cheeks are aflame. Come on, Master Peyrol! , more glasses! Little Thingummy is going to propose a toast. John Peyrol brings glasses and they drink; the first toast is to Madame Eysette, the second to Monsieur Eysette, then Jack, Daniel, old Annie, Annie's husband, the University, and goodness knows what else.

Two hours are spent in libations and homely chat. They talk of past days, dark with mourning, and of the future, rosy with hope. They remember the factory, Lyon,

Lantern Street, the poor Abbé whom they loved so much...

Suddenly little Thingummy rises to go.

"So soon?" asks old Annie sadly.

Little Thingummy begs to be excused: he has to see someone in town before leaving—an important visit.

What a pity! they were having such a good time—and so many things remained to be said. Well, if it can't be helped, if Master Daniel has to pay a visit in the town, his friends of the tavern will not detain him any longer:

"Good journey, Master Daniel! God bless you, sir!"

And John Peyrol and his wife accompany him to the street with farewells and benedictions.

Well, can you guess whom little Thingummy wants to visit in town, before departing?

It is the factory, *his* beloved factory, for which he has longed and wept so much: the garden, the workshops, the tall plane-trees, friends of his childhood in the old days of happiness. Can you feel with him?

The human heart is a weak thing: it loves what it can love, be it only wood, or stones, or a factory...

Moreover, History tells us that after returning to England, the aged Robinson again took to sea and travelled thousands of miles in order to see his desert island once more.

Hence it is not surprising that little Thimgummy should walk a few steps to see his own island once more.

The tall plane-trees, whose leafy crowns look over the roofs, have recognized their old friend who hastens towards them. They wave to him from afar and bend toward their neighbours, as if to say: "Here comes Daniel Eysette! Daniel Eysette has returned!"

He is walking faster and faster: but when he reaches the factory he halts in astonishment.

High grey walls face him, and not an Oleander leaf, not a Pomegranate branch show over these walls. There are skylights instead of windows; there is a chapel in place of the workshop. Over the door hangs a large cross of red stone with a Latin inscription around it.

Oh painful surprise! The factory is not the factory any more: it is a convent of Carmelite nuns, where men may never enter.

## V. *EARN YOUR BREAD!*

SARLANDE is a small town in the Cévennes; it lies at the bottom of a narrow valley, enclosed on all sides by a high wall of mountains. When the sun shines upon it, it is a furnace; when the North wind blows, an icehouse.



On the night of his arrival the North wind had been howling all day; and although it was springtime, little Thingummy, perched on top of the stage-coach, felt his very heart freezing when he entered the town.

The streets were dark and deserted. On the Square a few persons were waiting for the coach, walking up and down in front of the ill-lit office.

I climbed down from my roof seat and at once asked to be shown the way to the College; I did not want to lose a minute's time. So great was my haste to enter upon my service.

The College was not far from the Square; the man who carried my trunk led me through two or three wide, silent streets and stopped in front of a large building, where everything seemed to have been dead for years.

"Here we are," he said, lifting the enormous knocker.

The knocker fell with a very heavy thud. The door opened and we went in.

I stopped for an instant under the porch, in the dark. The man placed my box on the ground and as soon as I paid him he went off in a hurry... Behind him the great door closed heavily... After a little while a sleepy doorkeeper appeared, carrying a large lantern.

"You are a new pupil, of course?" he asked me in a sleepy voice.

He was taking me for a schoolboy.

"I am not a student at all, I am the new usher; take me to the Principal."

The doorkeeper looked surprised; he raised his cap a little and invited me to step into his lodge for a few minutes, as the Principal was in Chapel with the children. I could see him as soon as evening prayers were over.

In the lodge people were at supper. A tall, handsome fellow with a blond moustache was sipping a glass of brandy, seated next to a thin and sickly little woman, as yellow as a quince and muffled up to the ears in a faded shawl.

"What is it, Monsieur Cassagne?" asked the moustachioed man.

The doorkeeper pointed to me:

"The new usher. The gentleman is so short that I took him at first for a pupil."

"As a matter of fact, sir," said the moustachioed one, looking at me over his glass, "we have here students who are much taller and even older than you. Veillon Major, for instance."

"And Crouzat," added the doorkeeper.

"And Soubeyrol," said the woman.

Thereupon, they began to whisper among themselves, bent over their nasty brandies and shot critical side-glances at me. From without came the wailing of the wind and the shrill voices of the school boys reciting the Litanies in Chapel.

Suddenly, a bell rang and at once the noise of many feet was heard in the hall.

"Prayers are over," announced M. Cassagne and got to his feet. "Let us go upstairs to the Principal."

He took his lantern and led the way.

The school seemed immense; interminable corridors, wide porches, broad stairs with wrought-iron handrails; and everything was black with age.

The doorkeeper told me that until the year '89 the building had been occupied by a Naval College, with as many as 800 students, all of whom were of the highest nobility.

While he was imparting me this valuable information we reached the Principal's study.

M. Cassagne gently pushed open a padded folding door and knocked twice on the woodwork. A voice answered: "Come in."

We stepped into a large study, papered in green. At the far end the Principal was writing at a long table: a lamp with a completely lowered shade diffused a pale light.

"Sir," said the doorkeeper, pushing me forward, "this is the new master, who comes to take M. Serrières' place."

"All right," said the Principal, impassively.

The man bowed and left the room. I remained standing in the middle of the floor, twisting my hat between my fingers.

Having finished his work, the Principal turned to me and I could examine at leisure his small withered face, lit up by a pair of cold, pale eyes. He, on the other hand, raised the lamp-shade in order to see me better and placed a pince-nez on his nose.

"A child!" he exclaimed, jumping in his armchair, "they have sent me a child!"

It gave little Thingummy a terrible fright. He saw himself in the street, without any means. He was hardly able to stammer a few words and hand over the letter of introduction that he carried.

The Principal took it, read and re-read it, folded it and unfolded and read it again and finally said that although he found me too young, he agreed to accept me in view of the Rector's special recommendation and the respectability of my family. Then he embarked upon a long discourse on the gravity of my new duties; but I was not listening. For me the only important thing was that I was not going to be sent away. I was not to be sent away: it made me happy, crazily happy. I wished that Monsieur the Principal had possessed a thousand hands and that I could kiss them all.

A frightful clang of old iron put an end to my effusive thanks. I turned round with a start and found myself facing a tall and thin individual with red side-whiskers, who had silently come into the room: the Superintendent.

His head drooped on one shoulder, like that of an *Ecce Homo* image as he looked at me with the sweetest of smiles; and all the while he was shaking a bunch of keys that dangled from his fore-finger. The smile might have disposed me favourably towards him, but the keys were jingling and grating with a frightful sound—frink! frink! frink!—which made me shudder.

"Monsieur Viot," said the Principal, "this

is the substitute for M. Serrières. He has just arrived."

M. Viot bowed and gave me the gentlest smile of the world. His keys, on the contrary, rang out an ironical and nasty tune, as if saying: "Well, well! this little fellow to replace M. Serrières! What a joke!"

The Principal understood the keys as well as I did and added with a sigh:

"I know that in losing M. Serrières we suffer an almost irreparable loss,"—here the keys actually broke into a sob—"but I am sure that the order and discipline of the house will not suffer unduly from M. Serrières' departure, if M. Viot will be kind enough to take the new master under his special protection and give him the benefit of his valuable views on education."

Still smiling, M. Viot replied in sweet tones that I was assured of his benevolence and that he would willingly help me with his advice; but the keys were not benevolent at all. You should have heard them shaking and clanging in a frenzy: "Beware, little rascal, beware!"

"Monsieur Eysette," concluded the Principal, "you may withdraw. To-night you will have to sleep at the hotel... Report here to-morrow morning at eight o'clock. You may go."

He dismissed me with a dignified gesture.

Monsieur Viot, smiling sweeter than ever, accompanied me to the door; but before leaving me he slipped a booklet in my hand.

"The Regulations of the house," he told me. "Read, and meditate."

Then he opened the door and closed it behind me, shaking his keys.... "Frink! frink! frink!"

The gentlemen had forgotten to give me a light. I wandered in the darkness of the vast corridors, groping along the walls in order to find my way. At intervals the moonlight filtered through the grating of a skylight and helped me to know my bearings. Suddenly a brilliant point of light appeared in the dark, coming towards me. As I moved forward the light grew larger, came closer till it passed me and moved away, to disappear in the distance. It was like an apparition; but, short as its duration had been, I could perceive all in detail.

What I saw was this: two women—no, two shadows... One of them old, wrinkled, shrivelled, stooping, with enormous spectacles which half hid her face; the other young and slender, somewhat lean, as all spectres are, but having—unlike most other spectres—a pair of dark eyes, very large eyes—and very dark too. The hag held a small copper lantern; Dark Eyes was not carrying anything... The two shadows floated past swiftly, silently, without seeing me; and they had vanished a long time when I was still standing on the same spot, under the double spell of beauty and fear.

I resumed my groping journey, but my heart was pounding and I kept seeing in the

shadows that awful spectacled witch walking beside Dark Eyes. . .

The problem was however to find a shelter for the night and it did not appear to be an easy one. Fortunately I met the man with the moustache smoking a pipe at the door of the gatekeeper's lodge. He at once offered to take me to a small hotel, not too expensive, but where I should be looked after like a prince. You can imagine with what joy I accepted.

The moustachioed man seemed to be a good fellow; on the way I learnt that his name was Roger, that he taught dancing, riding, fencing and gymnastics at Sarlande College, and that he had served for many years in the Chasseurs d'Afrique.<sup>1</sup> This information completely won him my heart. Children are always fond of soldiers. We parted at the door of the hotel, with much shaking of hands and the formal promise to become good friends.

And now I have a confession to make, dear reader.

When little Thingummy found himself alone in the cold room of the inn, with the uninviting strange bed, far away from those he loved, the great philosopher's courage gave way and he wept like a child. Life seemed terrifying to him; he felt feeble and helpless against it and he cried and cried. Suddenly, in the midst of his tears, the thought of his

<sup>1</sup> "Chasseurs d'Afrique"—French Colonial Infantry Regiment. (Translator's note).

dear ones rose to his mind; he saw the abandoned house, the dispersed family, his mother here, his father there. . . no roof over them, no home! And little Thingummy, forgetting his own despair at the thought of their common misfortune, formed a great and beautiful resolution: to reunite the Eysette family and rebuild their home with his own single-handed effort. Proud at having set himself this lofty task, he dried his tears, unworthy of a man and builder of homes, and immediately plunged into M. Viot's Regulations, in order to make himself acquainted with his future duties.

These Regulations, lovingly recopied in M. Viot's own hand, were a real treatise; they were methodically divided into three parts:

1. The usher's duties towards his superiors.
2. His duties towards his colleagues.
3. His duties towards the students.

All eventualities were foreseen, from the broken window-pane to the case of two hands raised simultaneously in the classroom; every detail of a master's life was recorded, from the amount of his salary to the half-bottle of wine allowed him at each meal.

The Regulations ended with a fine piece of eloquence: a discourse on the utility of the Regulations themselves, but despite his respect for M. Viot's writings, little Thingummy had not the energy to go through the whole of it and fell asleep exactly in the middle of the most inspired passage.



I did not rest well that night. Fantastic dreams disturbed my sleep: now I heard M. Viot's terrible keys repeating their "Frink! frank!" now I saw the spectacled fairy seated herself at my bedside, so that I awoke with a start; then again the Dark Eyed one—and how very dark her eyes were!—they looked at me from the foot of my bed, with strange obstinacy.

Next morning at 8 o'clock, I was at the College. M. Viot was standing at the door, keys in hand, receiving day-scholars. He greeted me with his sweetest smile.

"Wait under the porch," he said; "and after all the students have arrived, I shall introduce you to your colleagues."

I waited under the porch, walking up and down and sweeping off my hat to the Professors, who were arriving in a breathless hurry. Only one of the gentlemen returned my salute: he was a priest, the professor of Philosophy.

"He is an eccentric," said M. Viot.

I lost my heart at once to that eccentric.

The bell rang. The classrooms filled. Four or five tall fellows between twentyfive and thirty years of age came skipping and running and stopped in confusion on seeing M. Viot.

The Superintendent pointed to me:

"Gentlemen, this is Monsieur Daniel Eysette, your new colleague."

Having spoken, he performed a deep obeisance and withdrew, still smiling, his

head still bent on one shoulder, and still jingling the hideous keys.

My colleagues and I looked at one another for a moment, without speaking.

The tallest and biggest of them spoke first; he was M. Serrières, the famous Serrières, whose place I was to take.

"My word!" he exclaimed jovially, "this is indeed the proof of the saying that the masters follow, but do not resemble each other."

This was an allusion to the prodigious difference in stature between us. There was a great deal of laughter, and I laughed the loudest; but I can assure you that in that instant little Thingummy would have willingly sold his soul to the devil for a few inches added to his height.

"Never mind," the big fellow continued, holding out his hand to me, "although we are not built to the same measure we can still empty a few bottles together. Come along, old man! I am giving a farewell party at the Café Barbette. I want you to join us and we shall make friends over a glass of punch."

He locked his arm in mine and pulled me into the street, without waiting for a reply.

The Café Barbette, to which my new friends were leading me, was situated in the Square. It was frequented by the non-commissioned officers of the garrison, and the first thing to strike you, on entering, was the large number of shakos and sword-belts hanging on the window-frames.

On that day Serrières' departure and his farewell punch had attracted the habitués in serried ranks. Serrières introduced me to the soldiers, who received me with great cordiality. However, to tell the truth, little Thingummy's entry failed to cause any sensation, and soon I was sitting, forgotten, in a corner of the room, where I had timidly sought refuge. While the glasses were being filled, big Serrières came to sit with me; he had taken off his frock-coat and was smoking a long clay pipe, which bore his name in procelain letters. All college ushers had a similar pipe in the Café.

"You see, old man," said Serrières, "there are after all some happy moments in this profession of ours. Everything considered, you have not come to a bad place for a start. First, the Café Barbette's absinthe is excellent, and second, you will be quite well off in that joint."

The "joint" was the College.

"You'll have to look after the small boys—those who must be ruled with an iron hand. You will see how I have drilled them! The Principal is not bad; the colleagues are good fellows, excepting that old man Viot and the hag. . ."

"What hag?" I asked, startled.

"Oh, you will come to know her soon. You can meet her at all hours of the day and night, prowling about the school, with a pair of enormous spectacles. She is an aunt of the Principal and acts as housekeeper. Old

scoundrel! If we don't starve it is not through her fault."

I had recognized the spectacled witch by Serrières' description, and felt that I was blushing against my will. I was ten times on the point of interrupting him, to ask: "And whose are the dark eyes?" But I dared not. How could I speak of those dark eyes in the Café Barbette?

In the meantime the punch was handed round; empty glasses were filled and full glasses emptied; soon toasts, shouts, billiards, pushing and jostling, laughter and heavy jokes and outspoken intimacies filled the room.

After a time little Thingummy lost his shyness. He left the shelter of his corner and wandered about the Café, glass in hand.

By now, the sergeants and corporals had become his friends; unblushingly he told one of them that he belonged to a very rich family and had been expelled from his parents' house for some youthful misdeed; he had become a school usher in order to earn a living, but he did not intend to stay at the College for long. Not he, with so rich a family!

If they could have heard him in Lyon!

Strange are the ways of the world: when the Café Barbette heard that I was a boy of good family who had disgraced himself, a young rascal, a good-for-nothing scamp, and not, as they might have thought, a penniless boy whom poverty forced to schoolmastering, everybody looked at me with a more respectful eye. Even the senior non-coms deigned to

talk to me. And to crown my success: when it was time to live Roger, the fencing-master, my friend of last night, rose and proposed a toast to Daniel Eysette. I need not tell you that little Thingummy felt rather proud.

The toast to Daniel Eysette gave the signal for break up. It was a quarter to ten: time to return to school.

The man of the keys was expecting us on the doorstep.

"M. Serrières," he said to my big colleague, who was tottering under the influence of the farewell punch, "you will lead your pupils for the last time into the hall: as soon as they are in their places, the Principal and I shall introduce the new master."

Actually, a few minutes later the Principal, M. Viot and the new master effected a solemn entry into the study hall.

Everybody rose.

The Principal introduced me to the students in a lengthy but very dignified speech; then he withdrew, followed by big Serrières, who was getting more unsteady under the effects of the punch. M. Viot stayed behind. He made no speech, but his keys spoke for him—"Frink! frink! frink!"—in so threatening, so terrifying a manner that all heads went into hiding under the lids of the desks and the new schoolmaster himself did not feel happy at all.

No sooner than the terrible keys had gone, so many mischievous faces emerged from the desks, the feathers of so many quills

went up to their lips with so many childish eyes fixed upon me, bright with laughter and mischief, and a long-drawn whisper ran from desk to desk.

Feeling slightly confused, I slowly ascended the steps of my pulpit; I attempted to cast a fierce look about me, then I took a deep breath and shouted, between two hard blows on the table:

“Get to work, boys, get to work!”

Thus little Thingummy took charge of his class.

## VI. MY LITTLE BOYS

THE small boys were not wicked—as the others were. They never hurt me, and I loved them, because they were as yet untouched by school life and you could read their souls in their eyes.

I never punished them. Why should I? Are birds ever punished? If their chirping grew too loud, I had only to call, “Silence!”—and at once my aviary was quiet—for five minutes at least.

The eldest of the class was eleven. Eleven years old! And big Serrières boasted of having drilled them with an iron hand!

I did not drill them: I tried to be always kind to them, that was all.

Occasionally, when they had been very good, I told them a story. A story! Oh happiness! Quickly, quickly, exercise books were laid aside, books were closed; inkpots, rulers, pen-holders were thrown pell-mell into the desks: then they would rest their crossed arms on the tables with wide open eyes, ready to listen. I had composed five or six fantastic little tales for them: "Miss Cicada's Adventures," "The sad story of Johnny Rabbit" and so on. Then as now, good old La Fontaine was my favourite in the Literary Saints' Calendar and my romances were but commentaries on his Fables; but I also borrowed from my own life. There was always a poor little cricket, who was forced to earn his bread, like little Thingummy himself; there were always lady-birds who pasted cardboard boxes, sobbing all the time, like Eysette (Jack). The stories were great fun for my little boys and great fun for me too. Unfortunately Monsieur Viot held different views on the question of fun.

Three or four times a week the awful man with the keys made a tour of inspection through the college, in order to ascertain whether everything was happening according to regulations. Well, one day he appeared in our study hall just at the most pathetic moment of Johnny Rabbit's sad life. At the sight of M. Viot the whole class jumped with fright. The children looked at each other with scared eyes. The story-teller stopped abruptly. Amazed, Johnny Rabbit paused

with one paw in the air and pricked up his long ears in terror.

Standing in front of my pulpit, the smiling M. Viot surveyed the empty desks with a long look of astonishment. He said nothing, but his keys were fiercely rattling: "Frink! frink! so you are not working, little blackguards!"

Trembling I tried to appease the terrible keys.

"The students have been working hard these last days," I stammered, "I wanted to reward them by telling them a little story."

M. Viot did not answer. He bowed smiling, let his keys snarl once more, and went out.

In the evening, at four o'clock recreation, he came to me and handed me, silently smiling, the Book of Regulations opened at page 12: "Duties of the teacher towards his pupils."

I understood that I was not allowed to tell stories and never did it again.

My little boys were disconsolate for a few days. They missed Johnny Rabbit and it broke my heart because I could not bring him back to them. I was fond of those little fellows you know! We were always together. The College was divided in three separate groups: Senior, Intermediate and Junior; each group had its own courtyard, its dormitory, its study hall. So I had my little boys quite to myself; they were mine; I felt that I had thirtyfive children of my own.



Apart from them I had not a single friend. However much M. Viot smiled at me, took my arm during Recreation and gave me his advice on matters regarding Regulations, I did not, I could not like him: I was too afraid of his keys. As to the Principal, I never met him. The Professors despised little Thingummy and looked down upon him from the height of their wisdom. And as to my colleagues, the apparent friendliness shown me by the man with the keys had estranged them from me; moreover, I had not been to the Café Barbette since my introduction to the soldiers, and this was in their eyes an unpardonable omission.

Everyone, even the doorkeeper Cassagne and Roger the fencing master, were against me. More than anyone else, the fencing master seemed to bear me a grudge. Whenever I met him, he twirled his moustaches fiercely and looked about him with wildly rolling eyes, as if he were to draw his sabre against a hundred Arabs. On one occasion he said very loudly to Cassagne that he did not like spies. Cassagne gave no reply: but I could understand by his looks that he did not like them either. What spies were they talking about? I wondered a good deal.

Against this general show of antipathy I took my stand bravely. I shared a small room with the master in charge of the Intermediate section: it was situated on the third floor, in the attic. There I fled during lecture hours. Since my room-mate spent most of his time

at the Café Barbette, I had the room to myself; it belonged to me, it was my home.

As soon as I set foot in it, I would lock the door, drag my box—there was no chair in the room—to the ancient writing desk riddled with inkspots and pen-knife inscriptions, spread my books on it and start to work.

It was spring then. Lifting my head from my books, I could see the blue sky and also the tall trees in the courtyard, already covered with leaves. No sound came from outside; only from time to time the monotonous voice of a pupil reciting his lessons or an exclamation from an angry teacher, or perhaps sparrows quarrelling in the trees . . . . Then silence again, the school seemed asleep.

But little Thingummy was not asleep. He was not even dreaming—a lovely way of being asleep. He was working, working without respite, cramming his brain with Greek and Latin, until it seemed to burst.

Sometimes, in the very midst of his weary task, a mysterious hand would knock at the door.

“Who is it?”

“It is I, the Muse: your friend of old times, the Lady of the Red Copybook. Open the door, little Thingummy, let me in!”

But little Thingummy knew better than to let her in. The Muse indeed! and what next, please? He had no time for her now.

The devil take the red copybook! The only thing that mattered at present was to write a lot of Greek, to take his degree, to be

appointed as teacher; and to build as quickly as possible a beautiful brand-new home for the Eysette family.

The thought that I was working for my family gave me great courage and made life sweeter for me. Even my room seemed brightened by it. Dear old attic! What happy hours I spent within your four walls! How well I worked there, how brave I felt!

If I had some pleasant hours, there were also bad ones. Twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays, I had to take the children for a walk. These walks were a torment for me.

We usually went to the Prairie—a large meadow, spread like a carpet at the foot of a hill, half a mile distant from the town. It was a pleasant and inviting place, with its ancient chestnut-trees, three or four small taverns, painted in yellow, and a little brook running through the green fields. The three groups went there separately; on arriving they were put in charge of a single master—it was invariably me. My two colleagues went off to be entertained by the senior boys in the nearby taverns, and as I was never invited, I stayed there to look after the pupils. A hard lot in that lovely place!

It would have been so nice to lie down on the green grass, in the shadow of the chestnut-trees, and get drunk with the smell of wild thyme, and listen to the song of the little stream! Instead, I had to watch and shout and scold. I was in charge of the entire school. It was too bad.

But as it was to keep watch over the boys on the Prairie, the worst was the walk through the town with my squad, the Juniors. The other groups marched along in step, tramping like veterans of the Great Army: they gave an impression of discipline and of beating drums. My children on the other hand did not care for these things. They did not march in ranks; they strolled hand in hand and prattled all the time. I could shout as much as I liked: "Keep in step!"—they did not understand me and went on in disorder.

I was rather pleased with the head of the column where I put the oldest and most serious boys, those who wore tunic; but the tail! what a mess! what disorder! A rabble of wild-looking brats with tousled hair, dirty hands and ragged trousers! I dared not look at them.

"Desinit in Piscem" commented M. Viot, who was quite witty at times.

Actually the tail of my column was a sad sight.

Can you imagine my despair at having to show myself in this sad plight in the streets of Sarlande, and on Sunday too! The church bells were chiming, the streets were full of people. We met young ladies from boarding schools, on their way to Vespers, milliners' girls with pink bonnets, fashionable youths in pearl-grey trousers. And I had to parade through this crowd in a shabby suit and with a ridiculous mob at my heels: what a shame!

Among the crowd of disorderly little imps

whom I led twice a week through the town there was one, a day-scholar, whose ugliness and bad manners drove me to despair.

Imagine a hideous little monkey, ridiculously small, uncouth, dirty, unkempt, smelling of the gutter and bandy-legged on top of it.

Never had such a pupil, if indeed such a creature could be called a pupil, been on the register of the school. It was enough to bring disgrace on any institution.

I for one had taken a strong dislike to him; and when I saw him on our outings, waddling at the tail of the column with the graceful gait of a young duck, I felt wildly tempted to drive him away with a few good kicks, and to rid my squad of this shame.

Bamban,—we had nicknamed him Bamban because of his more than irregular gait—Bamban belonged to a family anything but aristocratic. This was clearly demonstrated by his manners, his expression and especially by his distinguished associates.

All street urchins of Sarlande were his friends.

Thanks to Bamban we had, whenever we went out, a swarm of ragamuffins at our heels; they strutted along behind us, called Bamban by name, pointed at him with their fingers, threw chestnut peels at him and performed a thousand other monkey-tricks. My little boys thought it great fun, but I did not, and addressed every week a circumstantial report to the Principal on the pupil Bamban and the

several irregularities brought about by his presence.

Unfortunately my reports produced no results and I was still forced to show myself in the streets in the company of Monsieur Bamban, dirtier and more bow-legged than ever.

One Sunday, a gloriously jolly and bright day, he presented himself for our promenade with his toilet in such a state that all of us were horrified.

You could not imagine such a sight in your dreams. His hands were black, his shoes had no laces, there was mud all over him, even in his hair, he had practically no trousers left—a monster.

The funniest part was that he had evidently been beautified on that day, before being sent to me. His hair, better combed than usual, was still stiff with pomade, and the bow of his tie suggested a mother's fingers. But there were so many gutters between home and school!

Bamban had wallowed in all.

When I saw him take his place among the others, peaceful and pleased as if nothing was wrong I was overcome by disgust and indignation.

"Go away!" I shouted.

Bamban thought I was joking and continued to smile. He felt he was looking his best that day.

I roared again: "Go away! Go away!"

He looked at me, sad and submissive: his eyes were entreating. But I was inexorable

and the squad moved off, leaving him alone, immobile in the middle of the street.

I expected to be rid of him for the rest of the day ; but at the gates of the town laughter and whispers among my rear-guard caused me to look back. At four or five steps' distance Bamban was gravely following us.

"Walk faster!" I told the boys of the first row. The boys understood that a trick was to be played upon Bamban of the bow-legs and the column went off at a terrific pace.

From time to time we turned round to see whether Bamban was able to follow and laughed at the sight of him far away in the distance, looking not bigger than a man's fist, trotting along the dusty road between the vendors of cakes and sweet drinks.

The crazy creature arrived on the Prairie hard on our heels. But his face was white with fatigue and he was limping in a pitiful way.

I felt sorry for him and ashamed at my cruelty ; I called him to me in a gentle voice.

He was wearing a faded little blouse with red checks—the blouse of little Thingummy at school in Lyon.

I recognized this blouse at once, and said to myself: "Are you not ashamed, you villain? It is you, it is little Thingummy whom you are mocking and tormenting." And full of inward tears, I offered my love to the poor neglected child.

Bamban had sat down on the ground : his legs were aching. I sat down with him. I

talked to him, bought him an orange ; I should have liked to wash his feet.

From that day Bamban became my friend and I learnt some moving details about him.

He was the son of a farrier ; the poor man, having heard from all sides the praise of education, was bleeding himself in order to send his child, as a day scholar, to the College. Alas ! Bamban was not made for the College and he made no progress at all.

On his first day at school he had been given a model of a stick and had been told to draw sticks !

And for a year Bamban had drawn sticks. And what sticks, good Lord ! Crooked, dirty, lame, lopsided sticks, real Bamban sticks.

Nobody bothered about him. He did not belong to any class in particular : generally he walked into the first classroom he found open. Once he was discovered, drawing sticks in the philosophy class...Bamban was an unusual student indeed.

I observed him, at times, in the study hall, doubled up over a paper, perspiring and breathing hard, with his tongue protruding while he gripped the pen in both hands and pressed on it as if he intended to pierce the table. For each new stick he dipped his pen in ink and at the end of each line he withdrew his tongue and rested, rubbing his hands.

Now that we were friends Bamban worked with greater zeal.

When he finished a page, he would hurry forward, climb the steps of the pulpit on all



fours and without a word place his masterpiece under my eyes.

I would give him a friendly little slap and say,

"Very good!"

It was awful, but I did not wish to discourage him.

And indeed, day by day the sticks stood straighter, the pen spluttered less and there was less ink on his copybooks. I believe I would have succeeded in teaching him something; but Fate parted us. The master of the Intermediate group was leaving the College. As the end of the school year was approaching, the Principal would not appoint another master. A bearded rhetorician was installed in the Juniors' hall and I was placed in charge of the Intermediate group.

I considered this event a catastrophe.

Primarily because I was afraid of the Intermediate students.

I had seen their performances on Prairie days and my heart failed me at the thought of having to live with them permanently.

Then, I had to leave my little boys, my children, whom I loved. How would the bearded rhetorician treat them? What would happen to Bamban? I was truly distressed.

The children too were disconsolate at my departure. On the day I presided for the last time at the study hall, it was a moment of general emotion when the bell rang. All of them wanted to kiss me good-bye. Some even found really kind words for me.

And Bamban?

Bamban said nothing; but as I was leaving the room, he came to me, deeply blushing, and solemnly put a copybook in my hands—a whole splendid volume of sticks which he had drawn for me.

Poor Bamban!

## VII. *THE USHER*

I took charge of the Intermediate Group.

I found there some fifty young scoundrels: chubby mountain lads, between twelve and fourteen years of age, whom their parents had sent to the College in order to have them transformed into little bourgeois at the cost of 120 francs per term.

They were rude, insolent and proud; among themselves they spoke a harsh mountain dialect which I did not understand; nearly all of them were ugly with the special ugliness of adolescence: they had large red hands covered with chilblains, voices like the cry of hoarse young cocks, vacant and brutal eyes—and they smelt of the college. They hated me even before knowing me. To them I was the enemy: the Usher; and from the very day I took my seat in their class room, war was declared between us, a relentless, bitter and ceaseless war.

Those cruel boys, how they tortured me!

I should like to speak of them without ill-feeling—those sad days are so far from us now! but I cannot! and listen! even at this hour, as I write these lines, my hand is trembling with angry resentment. I still feel as strongly as I felt then . . . .

They no longer think of me, I suppose. They do not remember little Thingummy! nor do they recall the beautiful eyeglass he had bought to give himself a more solemn air. All my former pupils are grown up and grave men now. Perhaps Soubeyrol is a notary, somewhere up in the Cévennes; Veillon (Minor) a clerk in a law court; Loupi a pharmacist and Bouzanquet a veterinary surgeon. They have their positions, and probably also paunches: they are respectable people.

But sometimes they meet, perhaps in their club or in the church square, and recall the good old school days! and then they may happen to talk of me.

—“I say, notary, you remember little Eysette, our usher at Sarlande, the fellow with the long hair and the pasty face? We did have a lot of fun with him, didn't we?”

You are right, my dear sir. You have a lot of fun with him and your ex-usher has not forgotten it yet.

Unhappy usher! Did he not make you laugh a good deal! and did you not make him cry a good deal? Yes, cry: you made him cry and this added very much to your fun.

How many times did the poor devil cower in his bed, on the close of a day of martyrdom,

biting his blanket, so that you might not hear his sobs!

It is so terrible to live surrounded by ill-will, to be always afraid, to be always on one's guard, always hostile, always armed; it is so terrible to deal out punishment—you are bound to be unjust sometimes—to be suspicious, to see traps everywhere, to have no peace while you eat, no rest when you sleep, to think always, even during the short periods of respite: "Oh my God! what will they do to me next?"

No—if Daniel Eysette, the usher, should live to be a hundred, he will never forget all that he had to endure at Sarlande College ever since he entered the Intermediates' hall.

And yet—I do not want to lie—I had gained something by this change: now I could see Dark Eyes.

Twice a day, at recreation, I could observe her from afar, working behind a window on the first floor, which overlooked our courtyard. The eyes seemed darker and larger than ever, bent interminably over needle work, from morning till night; for Dark Eyes was sewing, and sewing ceaselessly. It was for sewing, and for sewing alone that the old witch with the spectacles had brought her from the Foundlings' Home—Dark Eyes had neither father nor mother—and from the first day of the year to the last she sewed, sewed without respite, under the implacable eye of the horrible bespectacled fairy, who sat spinning by her side.

While I stood and looked at those eyes, the recreation hours seemed too short: I could have spent my life under that blessed window behind which the dark eyes were working. They too knew that I was there. From time to time they looked up from their sewing, our glances met and we talked—without speaking.

—“Are you, very unhappy, Monsieur Eysette?”

—“And you, poor Dark Eyes?”

—“I have neither father nor mother.”

—“And my father and mother are far away.”

—“The spectacled witch is terrible, you know.”

—“And the boys torment me so much.”

—“Courage, M. Eysette.”

—“Courage, beautiful Dark Eyes.”

We seldom said much more. I was always afraid of seeing M. Viot appear with his keys—frink! frink!—and up there behind the window Dark Eyes too had her M. Viot. After a minute's conversation she would quickly lower her glance and resume her sewing, under the fierce gaze of the large steel-rimmed spectacles.

Sweet Dark Eyes! Although we never met but from a long distance and never talked but through furtive glances, I loved her with my whole soul.

And there was also another whom I loved: the Abbé Germane.

Abbé Germane was the Professor of Philosophy. He was reputed to be an eccentric and

the whole college stood in awe of him—even the Principal, even M. Viot. He spoke very little, and when he did his tone was sharp and abrupt; he strode with his head held high and his cassock tucked up: like the march of a Guardsman, stamping the ground with the heels of his low shoes. He was tall and strong. For a long time I had thought that he was very good-looking; but one day on a closer look saw that his features though noble and strong as a lion's, had been horribly disfigured by small-pox; there was not one corner of his face that was not scarred, marred, seamed: Mirabeau in a cassock.

The Abbé lived in sombre solitude; he occupied a small room at the far end of the school, called the Old College. Nobody went to see him except his two brothers; two nasty never-do-wells, who were under my charge; and whose education he paid for. In the evening, when you crossed the courtyards to go upstairs, to the dormitories, you could see far up in the dark and dilapidated buildings of the Old College a small pale light on a lonely night vigil: Father Germane's lamp. And when I went downstairs at dawn, I often saw through the hazy morning air, the lamp, still lit; Father Germane had not gone to bed. He was said to be working on a great philosophical treatise.

As for me, I felt, even before I knew him, a strong sympathy for this strange priest. His terrible and beautiful face, resplendent with

intelligence, attracted me. But I had been frightened so much by stories of his odd and brutal ways that I dared not approach him. However I did approach him—to my great good fortune. It happened this way:

I must explain that I was at the time plunged up to the neck in the History of Philosophy. It was heavy work for little Thingummy.

Well, one day I conceived a desire to read Condillac. Between you and me, the fellow is not worth reading; he is a joke of a philosopher and his entire philosophical luggage would fit into the bezel of a one-franc ring; but you know what young people are: they have topsy-turvy notions about people and things.

So I wanted to read Condillac. I had to get a Condillac at any cost. Unfortunately there was none in the College library, nor did the Sarlande bookshops deal in this commodity. I decided to apply to Abbé Germane. His brothers had told me that his room contained over 2000 volumes, and I did not doubt that I should find there the book of my dreams. But that devil of a man terrified me and only for the sake of my beloved Monsieur de Condillac could I bring myself to climb the stairs which led to his den.

When I arrived at his door my legs were trembling with fear. I knocked twice, very softly.

"Come in!" answered a Titanic voice.

The terrible Father Germane was sitting

astride a low chair, his legs stretched out, his cassock tucked up and the muscles prominent under his black silk stockings. Leaning his elbows on the back of his chair, he was reading a large book with red borders and noisily puffing at a short brown pipe.

"It's you!" he said, hardly lifting his eyes from the folio. "Good morning! How are you? What do you want?"

The sharpness of his tone, the severity of the book-lined room, his cavalier attitude, the short pipe between his teeth—all this intimidated me very much.

I contrived however to explain somehow the object of my visit and to ask for the precious Condillac.

"Condillac! you want to read Condillac!" the Abbé answered, smiling. "What a funny idea! Would you not rather smoke a pipe with me? . . . That's a good little pipe hanging there on the wall—come on, take it down and light it. . . . You will see, that it is much better than all the Condillacs of this world."

I declined with a gesture, blushing.

"You do'n't want it? Please yourself, my boy . . . . Your Condillac is up there, on the third shelf to your left . . . you can take him away—I lend him to you. But don't damage him, or I shall cut off your ears!"

I got hold of the Condillac from the third shelf and was about to withdraw but the Abbé detained me.

"So you are interested in Philosophy?" he asked, looking into my eyes. "You don't



believe in it, by any chance? . . All fairy-tales, my boy, pure fairy-tales! And fancy anybody having wanted to make me a Professor of Philosophy! Can you beat it? To teach what? Zero, nothing! They could just as well have appointed me Inspector General of Stars or Controller of Pipe Smoking. . . . Oh, what a world! . . . Sometimes we are obliged to do strange jobs in order to earn our living . . . . You know something about it, don't you? No, you need not blush—I know well that you are not happy, you poor little usher, and that the boys are making your life miserable.”

Here Father Germane paused for an instant. He appeared to be very angry and knocked his pipe furiously upon his fingernail.

The good Abbé's pity for my lot had much affected me and I was holding up the Condillac, so as to conceal the big tears in my eyes. Almost at once the Abbé resumed :

“By the way! I forgot to ask you : do you love God? . . You see, my boy, you must love Him, and trust Him and pray to Him, pray hard : or else you will never pull through. I know only of three remedies against the great miseries of life : work, prayer, and a pipe, a clay pipe, and a short one, remember this. As to the philosophers, don't count on them : they will never help you. I know what I am talking about, you can trust me.”

—“I do believe you, Reverend Father.”

—“Now go away, you make me tired. Whenever you want books, you can come and

take them. The key to my room is always on the door and the philosophers are always on the third shelf to the left. . . Don't say anything. . . Good bye!"

Thereupon he returned to his book and did not even look at me as I went out.

From that day on I had all the philosophers of the universe at my disposal; I walked into Father Germane's room without knocking, as if it had been my own. When I visited his room he was usually in class, and the room would be empty, the little pipe lying on the edge of the table, surrounded by the red-bordered folios and innumerable papers, all covered with scrawls. At other times when Abbé Germane was in, I found him reading, writing or walking up and down with long strides. When I came in, I would say timidly :-

"Good day, Father!"

Usually he did not answer and I would take my philosophers from the third shelf to the left and go out—my presence seemed to be unnoticed. We did not exchange a dozen words in the whole year; but it did not matter—some inner voice assured me that we were great friends.

Time passed and the holidays were approaching. In the drawing class the music students could be heard all day long repeating polkas and marching tunes for the prize distribution. Everybody was cheered up by these polkas. During the last session in the school a lot of small calendars came out from the

desks, and each boy crossed at a date as the day ended: "One day less!" The courtyards were full of boards for the estrade; armchairs were beaten out, carpets were shaken. . . No more work, no more discipline. Only---always, and to the last---the hatred for the usher, and endless, the terrible practical jokes. . .

At last the great day arrived. It was time it did for I could not stand it much longer.

The prize distribution took place in my courtyard: the Intermediates' courtyard. I can still see it: the variegated tent, the white hangings on the walls, the large trees full of flags; and underneath a medley of toques, officers' caps, shakos, helmets, flower bonnets, top-hats, feathers, ribbons, plumes and pompons. At the far end was a long estrade, on which the college authorities were seated in armchairs of garnet-red velvet. Oh, that estrade! How small you felt below it! What an air of superiority and disdain it gave to those on top! None of the gentlemen wore his usual physiognomy.

Father Germane too was on the estrade, but he seemed to be unaware of it. Stretched out in his armchair, his head thrown back, he was listening to his neighbours with an absent-minded look; his gaze seemed to follow the smoke of an imaginary pipe into the foliage overhead.

At the foot of the estrade was the band---trombones and ophicleides---gleaming in the

sun; the schoolboys sat crowded on the benches, with a master at each end; behind them thronged the loudly talking parents, among whom the professor of the second class moved about, giving his arm to the ladies and calling: "Room, please, room!"—and lastly, M. Viot's keys, rushing about the courtyard, lost in the crowd:—frink! frink!—now here, now there, right, left, everywhere at the same time.

The ceremony began. It was hot; there was no air under the tent. Stout, crimson-faced ladies slumbered, in the shade of their feather hats, bald gentlemen mopped their heads with poppy-coloured silk handkerchiefs. Everything was red: the faces, the carpets, the flags, the armchairs. There were three speeches, all much applauded; but I did not hear them. Up on the first story, behind a window, the dark eyes were sewing in their usual place, and my heart went out to them. . . . Poor Dark Eyes! Not even on this day did the spectacled witch allow her to rest.

When the last prizewinner of the last class had been announced, the band broke into a triumphal march and everybody came to life. Chaos and confusion prevailed. The professors descended from the estrade; the students jumped over benches to join their families. People were embracing, and calling out to others: "Here! we are here!" The prize-winners' sisters were proudly carrying their brothers' laurels. Silk frocks were rustled between the chairs. . . . Little Thingummy stood

behind a tree and looked on, as these fine ladies swept past his thin and shy little figure in a threadbare suit.

Slowly the crowd thinned. The Principal and M. Viot stood at the gate; they patted the boys' cheeks, they bowed deeply to the parents.

"Good bye until next year, until next year!" the Principal was saying, with an alluring smile.

M. Viot's keys tinkled caressingly: "Frink! frink! frink! Come back, dear little friends, come back to us next year!"

The boys submitted tolerantly to these farewell, and bounded down the stairs.

There were some who stepped into fine carriages with coats of arms, their mothers and sisters arranging their wide skirts to make room for them; click-clack! went the whip—we are off to our country house! We are going home to our park, our lawns, to the swing under the acacias, the aviaries full of rare birds, the pool with its two swans, and the large balustraded terrace where sherbets are served in the cool of the evening. . .

Others climbed into family wagonettes, beside pretty lasses in white peasant head-dresses, all laughter and white teeth. The farm-wife—wearing her gold necklace—was driving. . . Off we go! we return to our farm: we are going to eat fat slices of bread and butter, to drink sweet Muscadet wine, to hunt for birds' nests all day long, and to roll in sweet-smelling hay. . .

Fortunate children! they were all going

away, they were all leaving. . . Oh! could I have gone away too. . .

### VIII. DARK EYES

Now the college is deserted. Everybody has left. Squadrons of big rats charge at a gallop through the dormitories, in full daylight. The inkstands are drying up in the desks. The sparrow club holds its festivities in the courtyard trees: friends from the town, the district, and the whole province have been invited and their chirping fills the air from morning till night.

Little Thingummy listens to them as he works in his room, in the attic. He has been allowed to stay in the school during the holidays, for charity's sake. He makes good use of this permission, drowning himself in Greek philosophers. But the room is too hot, the ceiling too low—the air is stifling. There are no shutters in the windows; the sun comes in like a burning torch setting everything afire. The plaster of the ceiling cracks and crumbles down. Large flies, dazed by the heat, sleep on the window-panes. Little Thingummy too is struggling hard against sleep. His head is leaden, his eyeballs are throbbing.

Work, Daniel Eysette, work! Think of the home you have to rebuild! But he cannot work: the print dances under his eyes; the

book itself begins to whirl round then the table and the whole room. Little Thingummy gets to his feet, to dispel this strange drowsiness, and walks a few steps: he reaches the door, sways, and collapses in a heap on the floor, overcome by sleep.

Outside, the sparrows chirp, the crickets sing their loudest, the plane-trees, white with dust and withered with heat, stretch their thousand branches in the sun.

Little Thingummy has a strange dream: it seems to him that there is a knock at his door, and that an ear-splitting voice calls his name: "Daniel, Daniel!" He knows this voice. . . It is the same which used to shout, a long time ago: "Jack, you are an ass!"

The knocking becomes louder and louder: "Daniel, my son, it is your father; open the door quickly."

Oh, what a frightful nightmare. Little Thingummy wants to answer, wants to go and open the door. He raises himself on his elbow; but his head is too heavy. He falls back senseless

When little Thingummy regains consciousness, he is quite surprised to find himself lying in a narrow snow-white bed, enclosed on all sides by blue curtains. A quiet room with soft daylight, and no other noise but the ticking of a clock and the tinkling of a spoon in a cup. Little Thingummy cannot understand where he is but feels very happy. The bed curtains open a little and M. Eysette senior, holding a cup, leans towards him with a smile on his

dear face and tears in his eyes. Little Thingummy can continue his dream.

"Is it you, father? Is it really you?"

"Yes, Daniel, yes, my darling child, it is I."

"Where am I?"

"In the infirmary; you have been here for eight days . . . you are well now, but you have been very ill."

"But you father, how is it that you are here? Do kiss me again. You know, when I look at you, I think I am still dreaming."

M. Eysette senior clasps him in his arms.

"There, there, cover yourself; be a good boy. The doctor does not want you to talk."

And to prevent his child from talking, the dear man talks himself all the time.

"Fancy, only eight days ago, the Wine Growers' Association sent me to tour the Cévennes. I was very much pleased, of course: for an opportunity to see my Daniel! I arrived at the College . . . They called you, they searched for you—no Daniel. I was shown your door; the key was on the inside. I knocked; no answer. Bum! I broke open the door with a kick, and there you were, on the floor, burning with fever. My poor child! how ill you have been! Five days of delirium! . . . I never left you for an instant. Your mind was wandering all the time; you kept talking of rebuilding the home. . . . You were shouting; (No keys! Take the keys from the locks!), . . . You are laughing? Well, I can tell you that I did not laugh. God! what a fright you gave



me on those nights! . . . And just think of it; a Monsieur Viot—it is Monsieur Viot, is it not? wanted to prevent my staying in the College overnight; he appealed to the Regulations. . . . Ha! ha! Regulations! What do I care about his Regulations? That blockhead thought he could frighten me by shaking his keys under my nose! . . . Upon my word! I gave him a good bit of my mind!”

Little Thingummy shudders at M. Eysette's daring; then he quickly forgets M. Viot and his keys.

“How is mother?” he asks, stretching out his arms, as if his mother were there, within reach of his longing arms.

“If you uncover yourself, I shall not tell you anything,” says M. Eysette crossly. “Your mother is well, she is staying with uncle Baptiste.”

“And Jack?”

“Jack is an ass! but when I say an ass, I don't mean it, of course. Jack is on the contrary a very good boy. Hell! don't uncover yourself! . . . He has quite a good post. He is always crying of course but he is very happy, though. His director has taken him on as a secretary.. He has nothing to do except take down dictations. A very pleasant situation indeed.”

“Poor Jack, so he is condemned to write down dictations for the rest of his life!”

Saying this, little Thingummy breaks into hearty laughter, and seeing him laugh, M. Eysette laughs too and at the same time scolds

him because of that damned blanket which is always slipping.

Blessed infirmery! Little Thingummy spends lovely hours inside the blue curtains of his sick bed. Monsieur Eysette does not move from his side; he stays there all day, sitting close by his son, and little Thingummy wishes that M. Eysette would never leave... Alas! that is impossible. The Wine Growers' Association need their travelling agent. He must leave, he must continue his tour of the Cévennes.

After his father's departure the boy remains alone, quite alone in the silence of the infirmery. He spends his days reading, ensconced in a large easychair by the window. Morning and evening the yellow Madame Cassagne brings him his meals. Little Thingummy drinks the bowl of broth, nibbles at the wing of chicken, and says: "Thank you, Madame."

That is all. This woman reminds him of sickness and dislikes her; he does not even look at her.

One morning, having said his "Thank you, Madame," as curtly as ever, without looking up from his book, he is very much astonished to hear a gentle, sweet voice reply:

"How do you feel to-day, Monsieur Daniel?"

Little Thingummy lifts his head, and can you guess what he sees? The dark eyes, the dark eyes in person, standing before him, smiling at him!

Dark Eyes announces to her friend that the yellow woman is ill and that she has been ordered to look after him. She also adds lowering her eyes, that she is very glad to see that M. Daniel has recovered. Then, after a deep curtsy, she withdraws saying she will return in the evening. And in the evening she really returns, and the next morning too and also in the evening. Little Thingummy is in a rapture. He blesses his illness, the yellow woman's illness, all the illnesses in the world: if nobody had been ill he could never have met Dark Eyes alone.

Blessed infirmery! What lovely hours little Thungummy spends in his convalescent's chair by the window! In the morning the dark eyes wear, under their long lashes, numberless golden spangles, glittering in the sun: in the evening they shed a soft light, like stars in the dark. Little Thingummy dreams of the dark eyes every night; he dreams so much that he does not sleep any more. Dawn finds him up on his feet, getting ready to receive them: there are so many secrets he wants to tell them! But when the dark eyes appear he does not say anything.

Dark Eyes is astonished at this silence. She comes and goes about the infirmery, and finds a thousand excuses for staying near the patient, always hoping that he will make up his mind to speak; but that damned little Thingummy can not make up his mind.

Occasionally though he summons up the whole of his courage and begins bravely:

“Mademoiselle . . .”

At once the dark eyes light up and smile at him. But at this smile the unfortunate fellow loses his head and continues in a trembling voice :

“I thank you very much for your kindness.”

Or :

“The soup is excellent to-day.”

Then Dark Eyes pouts prettily which means : “What! is that all?” and leaves the room, sighing.

When she has gone, Little Thingummy is in despair : “To-morrow, not later than to-morrow, I shall tell her.”

And on the morrow the same thing takes place.

At last little Thingummy wearies of the struggle : he feels that he will never have the courage to tell those dark eyes what he thinks, and he decides to write. One evening, he demands paper and ink—for an important letter, a very important letter indeed . . . . Clearly, the dark eyes have guessed what letter this is—they are so shrewd, those dark eyes! Quickly they fetch paper and ink, place them before the patient and go out, quietly laughing.

Little Thingummy begins to write; he writes all night; and when morning has come he perceives that the interminable letter contains only three words, three words and no more, but they are the most eloquent words

in the world and he trusts that they will make a deep impression.

Ready, now! Dark Eyes is coming!... Little Thingummy is very excited. He holds his letter in readiness and is swearing to himself that he will hand it over as soon as she enters... It will happen like this: Dark Eyes will come in, she will place the soup and the chicken on the table.

"Good morning, M. Daniel!"

And immediately he will tell her, with great courage:

"Sweet Dark Eyes, here is a letter for you."

Quiet! a bird's step in the passage.... the dark eyes are approaching.... Little Thingummy is ready, letter in hand. His heart flutters, he feels like dying.

The door opens... Oh horror!

Instead of Dark Eyes the old witch appears, the terrible spectacled witch.

Little Thingummy dare not ask for an explanation he is so dismayed. Why has she not returned?... He awaits the evening with impatience... Alas! in the evening Dark Eyes does not return either, nor on the next day; nor on the following days; never.

Dark Eyes has been turned out. She has been sent back to the Foundlings' Home where she will remain shut in for the next four years, until she comes of age. Dark Eyes has been stealing sugar!

Farewell, lovely days of the infirmary! The dark eyes are gone, and to fill the cup of

misery, the students are returning. So soon! does the school reopen, so soon? How short the holidays have been!

For the first time in six weeks little Thingummy descends to the courtyard, pale and thin, more of a little Thingummy than ever. The College wakes up. It is being cleaned from top to bottom. The corridors are streaming with water. M. Viot's keys are, as always, fiercely active. A terrible man, M. Viot—he has employed himself during the holidays with adding a few paragraphs to his Regulations and a few keys to his bunch. Little Thingummy will have to look out for himself.

Every day some of the schoolboys arrive. Click-clack! the wagonettes and carriages of Prize Distribution Day re-appear at the gates. Some of the old pupils do not answer the roll-call, but new ones take their places. The classes are re-grouped. This year, as in the last, little Thingummy will be in charge of the Intermediates; the poor usher is already trembling. But—who knows? perhaps the boys will be less wicked this year.

On the morning of the opening day there is music and singing in Chapel: the Mass of the Holy Ghost . . . *Veni Creator Spiritus!* . . . The Principal is there, in his solemn black suit, with the small silver palm in his button-hole. Behind him, is the staff—the professors in ceremonial gowns; those of the Sciences trimmed with orange-coloured ermine and those of the Arts with white. The dandi-

fied professor of the second class has indulged in a pair of delicately coloured gloves and a fancy cap; M. Viot does not look pleased . . . . *Veni Creator Spiritus!* . . . . Little Thingummy is at the back of the church, among the crowd of students; he contemplates with envy the imposing gowns and the silver palm emblems. . . . When will he become a professor too? When will he be able to rubuild the home? Alas! that day is still remote, and the road arduous . . . . *Veni Creator Spiritus!* . . . . Little Thingummy's soul is filled with sadness and the organ makes him want to cry. Suddenly he discovers far down in the choir, a beautiful, scarred face smiling at him. . . . It is good to see this smile; at the sight of Father Germane little Thingummy feels cheered and encouraged. *Veni Creator Spiritus!*

Two days after the Mass of the Holy Ghost comes another solemn occasion, the Principal's Day. On this day, since immemorial time, the College celebrates St. Theophilus's feast, in the open, with cold viands and Limoux wine. On this occasion, as usual, the Principal has spared no pains in giving glamour to the little family feast, which satisfies the generous instincts of his heart, without harming the interest of his College. At dawn masters and pupils pile into big carts, decorated with flags in the Municipal colours, and the procession sets forth at a gallop, followed by two enormous vans containing the baskets of sparkling wines

and eatables. Leading, in the first carriage are the bigwigs and the band. Orders have been issued to the musicians to blow very hard. . . . Whips are cracking, bells are tinkling, piles of crockery rattle as they knock against one another. Whole Sarlande appears at the windows, in its nightcap, eager to see the Principal's party. The feast is to take place on the Prairie. No sooner arrived, tablecloths are spread on the grass and the boys split their sides with laughter at the sight of the great professors sitting on the ground, like simple schoolboys, among violets. . . . Big slices of pie are handed round. Bottle corks are exploding. All eyes sparkle. Everybody is talking. . . . In the midst of this general merriment little Thingummy alone looks worried. Suddenly you can see him blushing. . . . The Principal has risen to his feet with a paper in his hand :

"Gentlemen, I have just now received a few verses, sent to me by an anonymous poet. It would seem that M. Viot, our Pindar of past years, has found a rival this time. Although these verses are rather too flattering for me, I ask your permission to read them aloud."

"Yes! . . . yes, read them? . . . read!"

And the Principal reads, in his best prize-distribution voice.

The poem is a well-turned compliment, full of pleasant rhymes, addressed to the Principal and his staff: there is a flower for everyone. Even the spectacled witch has been



remembered. The poet calls her the "Angel of the Refectory"—very charming indeed.

It is received with prolonged applause. Several voices clamour for the author. Little Thingummy rises, as red as a poppy, and bows modestly. Everybody cheers. Little Thingummy becomes the hero of the day. The Principal wants to embrace him. Old professors shake hands with him, in intimate way. The master of the second class wants his poem, in order to publish it in the paper. Little Thingummy is very pleased; all this praise goes to his head, together with the fumes of the Limoux wine. But it seems to him that he heard Abbé Germane mutter: "Idiot!" and his rival's keys emit a savage growl; this has a somewhat sobering effect.

When the first outbreak of enthusiasm has abated, the Principal claps his hands, claiming silence:

"And now your turn, Viot! After the merry Muse, let us hear the serious Muse."

Gravely M. Viot extracts from his pocket a stout copybook, heavy with promise; he casts a side-glance towards little Thingummy and begins his recital.

M. Viot's work is a truly Virgilian Idyll in honour of Regulations. The Student Menalchus and The Student Dorilas converse in strophes.... The Student Menalchus belongs to a College where Regulations are in full bloom; The Student Dorilas to another College, whence Regulations have been exiled.... Menalchus sings of the austere joys of strict

discipline; Dorilas. of the barren pleasures of unbridled freedom.

At last Dorilas breaks down. He places the palm of victory in the victor's hands, and both their voices join in a song of joy, to the glory of Regulations.

The poem has come to an end. . . . Deadly silence! . . . During the recital the boys have carried their plates to the far end of the meadow, and are eating their pie in peace, at a good distance from the Students Dorilas and Menalchus. From his place, M. Viot glares at them with a bitter smile. . . . The professors have held out, but not a single one has the courage to applaud. Unhappy M. Viot! It is a real defeat. The Principal attempts to comfort him:

"The theme was an arid one, gentlemen, but the poet has handled it creditably."

"I think it was beautiful," says little Thingummy impudently; he is beginning to regret his triumph.

These acts of cowardice are in vain. M. Viot does not want to be comforted. He does not reply; he merely bows and keeps up his bitter smile. He keeps it up all day; and when they return home in the evening, with the boys singing, the band blaring and the carts noisily bumping over the cobblestoned roads of the sleeping town, little Thingummy can hear his rival's keys wickedly mutter, close by, in the darkness: "Frink! frink! frink! my dear poet, we shall have our revenge!"

## IX. *THE BOUCOYRAN AFFAIR*

WITH the feast of St. Theophilus over, the holidays were buried.

The next days were sad days, beginning with a real morning-after-the-feast. Neither pupils nor teachers were in good spirits. Everyone was trying to settle down. After two long months of rest the College found it hard to resume its usual life. The wheels were not running smoothly—like those of an old clock that has been left unwound for a long time. By and by, however, regularity returned, thanks to M. Viot's efforts. Every day at the same hours, at the ringing of the same bell, little doors would open into the courtyards and long rows of children, as stiff as wooden soldiers, would file past in pairs, under the trees; then the bell rang again, "bim-bam", and the same children filed back through the same little doors. "Bim-bam! get up!"—"Bim-bam! go to bed!"—"Bim-bam! go and read!"—"Bim-bam! go and play!" And so on throughout the year.

Oh triumph of Regulations! How glad the Student Menalchus would have been, had he lived under M. Viot's ferule in the model College of Sarlande!

I alone cast a shadow over this entrancing picture. I was not getting on with my pupils. The terrible "intermediates" had come back to me from the mountains, uglier, coarser

and wilder than ever. My temper too was sharper; the illness had made me more irritable and nervous. I could not bear anything. Having been too mild in the past year, I was now too harsh. I hoped to curb those young scamps—and for the slightest misconduct I censured the whole class with extra tasks and detentions.

I had no success with this method. Being dealt out too freely, my penalties depreciated in value and fell to zero, till a day came when I had to admit defeat. The hall was in full rebellion and I had no ammunition left to make a stand against the riot. I can still see myself, dancing about on the dais like a little devil, amidst the howling, shrieking, whistling mob:

“Get out! . . . Kickerikée! . . . kss! kss! . . . Down with the tyrants! . . . Injustice! . . .”

And inkpots flew and paperballs rained on my desk, bunches of little monsters climbed on the platform, on the plea of making complaints, and screamed like monkeys.

As a last resource I sometimes called upon M. Viot for help. Just imagine the humiliation!

Since St. Theophilus's day the man with the keys was ill-disposed towards me, and I felt that now he rejoiced at my sad plight. When he suddenly appeared in the study hall, keys in hand, the result was that of a stone thrown into a pool full of frogs; in the twinkling of an eye every single boy was in his

place, his nose in a book. You could have heard the buzz of a fly. . . . For a few instants M. Viot wandered up and down, shaking his bunch of old iron in the deep silence: then he would cast an ironical look at me and go out without having said a word.

I was very unhappy. The masters, my colleagues, laughed at me. When I met the Principal, he treated me ungraciously—under M. Viot's influence, no doubt. Then came the affairs with Boucoyran, which was the final blow.

The Boucoyran Affair! I am sure that it has been preserved in the Annals of the College and that the citizens of Sarlande are still talking of it. . . . I too shall talk of it, of this terrible affair—it is time for the public to know the truth. . . .

Fifteen years of age, big feet, big eyes, big hands, no forehead, and the manners of a farm hand, such was the Marquis of Boucoyran, terror of the Intermediates' courtyard and only specimen of the Cévennes nobility at Sarlande College. The Principal was very fond of this student, in view of the aristocratic varnish his presence gave to the institution. In the College he was simply called "the Marquis". Everybody was afraid of him; I too was under the influence of this general respect and never spoke to him without circumspection.

For some time we lived together on rather good terms.

It is true that his Lordship would now

and then display certain impertinent ways of looking at me or answering me—ways which suggested too strongly the days of that Old Régime, but I tried to ignore them, I felt that this adversary was too strong for me.

One day however this puppy of a Marquis took the liberty of retorting—in the presence of the whole class—so insolently that I lost the last shred of my patience.

“Monsieur de Boucoyran,” I said trying to keep my temper, “take your books and leave the room at once.”

This was for him an unheard-of act of authority. He was amazed; he did not move from his place and looked at me with bulging eyes.

I realized that I was getting involved in a bad business, but I was too far gone to retreat.

“Leave the room, M. de Boucoyran!” I commanded again.

The boys sat motionless and expectant. For the first time I had silence in my class. . . .

The Marquis had recovered from his surprise and to my repeated orders he answered with an incredibly impertinent air:

“I shall not leave the room!”

A whisper of admiration ran through the hall.

I rose from my chair in indignation.

“You’ll not go, sir? Well, let us see.” And I descended the steps.

God is my witness that all thought of violence was far from my mind in that instant;

I only wanted to intimidate the Marquis by my firm manner; but when he saw me step down from the platform, he began to laugh in so sneering and contemptuous a way that I put out my hand to grip him by the collar and pull him out from his bench.

The wretch had hidden a huge iron ruler under his tunic. No sooner had I lifted my hand, than he dealt a frightful blow on my arm. I cried out in pain.

The whole class clapped their hands :

“ Well done, Marquis ! ”

Then I lost my temper. With one bound I landed on the desk, with another on the Marquis; then I took him by the throat and worked with fists, teeth, feet, and the rest of me, until I had torn him from his place and rolled him out of the hall, as far as the middle of the courtyard. It did not take more than a second; I should never have thought that I had such strength.

The students were struck with consternation. Nobody was shouting now : “ Well done, Marquis ! ” They were scared. Boucoyran, the strong one, punished by this milk-sop of an usher ! What an adventure ! I had gained in authority what the Marquis had lost in prestige.

When I retook my place on the dais, still pale and quivering with anger, every face in the room bent quickly over the desks. The class was subdued. But what about the Principal and M. Viot—what would they think of the matter : I dared raise my hand against

a pupil like the Marquis de Boucoyran! the nobleman of the school! Did I want to be dismissed?

These reflections—which came somewhat late—caused me some worry, in spite of my triumph. I too was scared. I said to myself: “Certainly the Marquis has gone to complain.” I expected to see the Principal appear at the door any minute. . . . I trembled until I left the schoolroom; but nobody came.

At recreation I was greatly astonished to see Boucoyran playing and laughing with the others. This somewhat reassured me and as the whole day passed uneventfully, I fancied that my young rascal would lie quiet and I should get off with only a scare.

Unfortunately next Thursday was a holiday. In the evening his Lordship the Marquis did not return to the dormitory. I had something of a presentiment and lay awake all night.

Next day, during first session in the study hall, the boys were whispering as they looked at Boucoyran’s place, which was empty.

I kept outwardly calm, but I was dying with anxiety.

About seven o’clock the door was abruptly opened. The boys rose. I was lost!

The Principal entered first, and in his rear M. Viot, and behind them came a tall old man, buttoned up to the chin in a long frock-coat, his neck encased in a four-inch collar. I did not know him, but I immediately understood that he was Monsieur de Bou-



coyran, the father. He was twisting his long moustache and grumbling between his teeth.

I had not even the courage to descend from my platform and do the honours; nor did they greet me upon entering. The three of them took up positions in the middle of the hall and did not once glance towards me until they left.

It was the Principal who opened fire.

"Gentlemen,"—he addressed the boys—"we have come on a painful errand. One of your masters has rendered himself guilty of so grave an offence that it is our duty to inflict public blame upon him."

Thereupon he went on inflicting it on me for at least a quarter of an hour. All facts were distorted; the Marquis was the best student in the College; I had brutally ill-treated him, without reason, without excuse. In short, I had utterly failed in my duties.

What could I answer to these accusations?

From time to time I tried to defend myself:

"I beg your pardon, sir. . . ."

But the Principal did not listen, and continued to inflict blame upon me to the last.

After him, M. de Boucoyran Senior took up the thread—and how! He delivered a stirring speech of indictment. Unhappy father! His child had been very nearly murdered. A certain person had flung himself upon the poor, defenceless little creature, had attacked it like a—a—like a bull, like a savage bull. For two days the child was confined to bed,

for two days his mother was nursing him, in tears. . . .

Ha! had he to deal with a man, he, M. de Boucoyran, the father, would have avenged his child. But that person was only a ragamuffin whom he looked upon with pity. That person should however remember this much: if he ever dared touch but a single hair of his son's head, the father would cut off that person's ears. . . .

During this fine speech the students were laughing in their fists and M. Viot's keys clinked with joy. Standing at his desk, pale with fury, that poor person listened to the insults, swallowed the humiliations, and took good care not to reply. If he had replied, he would have been dismissed from the school; and where would he go?

At last—after an hour—their eloquence was exhausted and the three gentlemen withdrew. Behind their back a great uproar broke out in the hall. I tried in vain to re-establish silence; the boys laughed in my face. The Boucoyran affair had given the death blow to my authority.

It was a terrible affair indeed!

It aroused the whole town. It was the only topic of conversation in the two clubs, in the cafés, at the band-stand. Well-informed people furnished details to make the listeners' hair stand on end. It appeared that this usher was a monster, a beast in human shape. He had tortured the child with unheard-of

refinements of cruelty. He was referred to simply as "The Butcher".

When young Boucoyran was tired of staying in bed, his parents settled him on a sofa in the best corner of their drawing-room, and for eight days an interminable procession filed through the apartment. All attentions were directed upon the interesting victim.

Twenty times in succession he had to repeat his story; and each time the wretch invented some new detail. Mothers shuddered, old maiden ladies called him "poor angel", and stealthily fed him with sweets. The opposition newspaper seized upon the incident and published a thundering article against the College, to the advantage of a religious institution in the neighbourhood....

The Principal was furious. I owed it only to the Rector's protection that he did not dismiss me. Alas! it would have been better for me had I been dismissed at once. Life had become impossible for me at the school. The boys did not listen to me any more; at the least word from me they threatened to act like Boucoyran and to complain to their fathers. In the end I gave it up and did not bother about them any more.

Amidst these troubles I was obsessed by a single idea; to revenge myself on the Boucoyrans. I saw the old Marquis' insolent face always before me, and my ears were still red from the threat that had been pronounced against them. Besides, should I even have wanted to forget the

insults I could not have done so. Twice a week, when we went for our walk and the squads passed the Café de l'Evêché, I was sure to find M. de Boucoyran Senior there; he planted himself in front of the door, surrounded by a group of officers of the garrison, all of them bareheaded with billiard cues in hand. They waited for us, grinning and sneering as we approached; then, when the squad came within hearing distance the Marquis would call out very loudly, measuring me with a provocative look:

"Good morning, Boucoyran!"

"Good morning, father!" yelped the ghastly child from his place in the ranks.

And everybody laughed, the officers, the boys, even the waiters of the café. . . .

This "Good morning, Boucoyran" had become a torment for me, and it was impossible to avoid it. In order to go to the Prairie we had to pass the Café de l'Evêché, and not once did my persecutor miss the rendezvous.

At times I was wildly tempted to walk up and challenge him; but I refrained for two reasons. The first was my constant fear of being dismissed; and the second, the Marquis' sword, a huge devil of a blade, which had claimed so many victims when he was serving with the Life Guards.

One day however my patience was exhausted and I went to see Roger, the fencing master, and declared that I had decided to challenge the Marquis. Roger, to whom I had

not spoken for a long time, at first listened with some reserve; but when I had finished, he grasped both my hands and shook them with effusive warmth:

"Bravo! Monsieur Daniel! I always knew that looking as you do, you could not be a spy! But why the devil were you always stuck to your M. Viot?..... Anyhow, we have met again and everything is forgotten. Give me your hand! you are a noble soul!.... You want to demand satisfaction? Very good!.... You do not know the first thing about fencing? Good, good! Very good!.... You want me to keep you from being put on the spit by that old turkey-cock? Excellent! Come to the fencing school and in six months' time it will be you who will put him on the spit!"

On hearing the excellent Roger espouse my interests with such fervour, I blushed with pleasure. We agreed upon lessons; three times a week; we also agreed upon the fees—exceptional fees. (Exceptional indeed! I learnt later that I had been charged twice the amount paid by others....) When all these agreements had been made, Roger slipped his arm familiarly under mine.

"M. Daniel," he said, "it is too late to start our first lesson to-day: still we can go and conclude our bargain at the Café Barbette.... Come on! don't be childish! Are you by any chance afraid of the Café Barbette? Come along, hang it! You must get away from this bunch of soured schoolmasters!.... You will find friends there, good fellows, noble

souls, by God! and among them you will quickly get rid of these girlish ways of yours, which do not suit you at all."

Alas! I yielded. We went to the Café Barbette. It had not changed; it was still full of loud voices, of smoke, of red trousers; the same shakos, the same sword-belts hung from the same hooks.

Roger's friends received me with open arms. He was right, they were all noble souls. When they were informed of my affair with the Marquis and of the decision I had taken, they all came, one by one, to shake hands with me:

"Well done, young man. Very well done."

I too was a noble soul. I ordered a punch, we drank to my victory, and it was decided among us noble souls that I should kill the Marquis de Boucoyran at the end of the school year.

## X. BAD DAYS

WINTER had come, the dreary, dark, awful winter of the mountains.

The college courtyards were sad to look at; the tall trees were leafless and the ground froze until it was harder than stone. We got up before daybreak, by lamp light; it was cold; there was ice in the wash basins. It seemed that the boys would never get ready; the bell had to call them several times.

"Quick please!" called the masters, walking up and down to get warm. The boys lined up silently, in some sort of order, and we went down the broad staircase, almost in darkness, and through the long corridors, icy with the freezing winter draughts.

A bad winter for little Thingummy!

I was not working any more. In the school-room the unhealthy heat from the stove made me drowsy. My attic was too cold, and during lecture hours I fled to the warmth of the Café Barbette and stayed there up to the last minute. It was there that Roger now gave me fencing lessons; the bitter cold had driven us from the fencing school and we fought our battles with billiard cues in the middle of the Café, drinking punch in the intervals. The non-commissioned officers acted as umpires; the noble souls had definitely admitted me into their intimate circle and daily taught me new and infallible thrusts for killing the poor Marquis de Boucoyran. They also taught me how to sweeten a drink of absinthe, and when they played billiards it was I who recorded the scores.

One morning during this sad winter, as I entered the Café Barbette—I can still hear the billiard balls knocking and the hum of the big faience stove—Roger hurried up to me: "Just a minute, Monsieur Daniel!" And he drew me into the back room, with an air of deep mystery.

He wanted to tell me about a love affair. You can imagine how proud I was to listen to

the confidences of so tall a man : it seemed to add to my own stature.

The story was as following. That devil of a fencing master had met, in a certain part of the town, which he could not name, a certain lady with whom he had madly fallen in love. This lady held in Sarlande a very high position—hm, hm, you see what I mean—so exceptionally high that the fencing master was still wondering how he had dared lift his eyes to such height. Nevertheless he hoped to win the lady's affection, in spite of her position—which was so high, etc.—and he even thought that the time had come to launch an epistolary declaration. Unfortunately fencing masters are not so skilful in handling the pen. He could manage with some common little girl ; but in the case of a lady in so high a position, etc., a rough soldiers' style would not do, and even a poet of rank would not be too much.

"I see what you mean," said little Thingummy with an experienced look. "You want someone to turn out a few neat compliments for you, ready to be sent to the lady, and you have thought of me."

"Exactly," answered the fencing master.

"All right! I am your man; we can start whenever you like. But unless you give me a few details about the lady, our letters will look as if they had been borrowed from the *Perfect Guide to Letter Writing*."

The fencing master cast a suspicious look



about him, then he poked his moustache into my ear and whispered :

"She is a blonde from Paris. She is perfumed like a flower and her name is Cecilia."

He was unable to tell me more, because of the lady's position, which was so high, etc.,—but this much information satisfied me and the same evening—in the schoolroom—I wrote my first letter to the blonde Cecilia.

The strange correspondence between little Thingummy and the mysterious lady lasted for nearly a month. For a month I wrote on an average two messages of passion every day. Some of these letters were of gossamer tenderness—like Elvira's Lamartine; others were all roaring flames—like Sophie's Mirabeau. There were some which began : "O Cecilia, at times in the rocky wilderness." and others which ended : "They say such passion is deadly—may it be!" Now and then the Muse took a hand :

"Oh your lips, your ardent lips!

Why so far from mine!"

To-day I can laugh when I talk of it; but at that time little Thingummy did not laugh, I assure you; and every word was written in great earnest. When I had finished a letter I gave it to Roger who would copy it in his careful sergeant's hand; and when he received a reply—for she replied, the unhappy woman!—he quickly brought it to me, and I used it as a base for further operations.

On the whole, I liked the game; perhaps I liked it too much. This invisible blonde

lady, perfumed like a white lilac, was ever in my thoughts. At times I imagined that I was writing on my own behalf; I filled my letters with confessions of my own, with maledictions against my fate, against the vile and wicked creatures amongst whom I was forced to live: "Oh, Cecilia, if you knew how I need your love!"

Sometimes, when big Roger came to tell me, stroking his moustache: "It is working, it is working! Go on!" I felt secretly vexed, and thought: "How can she believe that this glorious fool, this big blockhead, is writing those masterpieces of melancholic passion for her?"

She did believe it, though, and believed it so well that one day the fencing master triumphantly brought me an answer he had just received:

"To-night at nine, behind the townhall."

Did Roger owe his success to the eloquence of my letters or to the beauty of his moustache? I ask you, dear ladies... Little Thingummy however passed a very restless night in his gloomy bedroom. He dreamt that he was tall, that he had a moustache and that Parisian ladies—of a very high position—gave him rendezvous behind townhalls...

The most comic part came on the morrow; I had to write a letter of thanks to Cecilia, expressing my gratitude for the joy she had given me: "Oh angel who descended from heaven to pass a night on the earth;

I confess that little Thingummy wrote

this letter with rage in his heart. Fortunately the correspondence stopped there and for some time I heard nothing of Cecilia and her high position.

## *XI. MY GOOD FRIEND, THE FENCING MASTER*

THAT day--it was the 18th of February--the boys could not play in the courtyard, as a great deal of snow had fallen during the night. As soon as morning work was over, they were crowded pell-mell into the "Hall," to play there sheltered from the bad weather until lectures started.

It was I who watched them.

What we called the "Hall" had been the gymnasium of the ancient Naval School. Imagine four high bare walls with small barred windows; here and there were big iron hooks, half torn from the wall; still visible were the marks of the ladders; and a huge iron ring, swung by a rope from the central beam of the ceiling.

The boys seemed to enjoy themselves looking out at the snow-covered street and at the men who came, armed with shovels, to load the snow into carts.

But I heard nothing of the racket that was going on.

I was alone in a corner, reading a letter

with tears in my eyes; and if the boys had demolished the gymnasium completely I should not have noticed it at the time. The letter was from Jack, it had been delivered just then; and it bore a Paris postmark—Paris! my God, yes; Paris!—and this is what it said:

“Dear Daniel,

“My letter will give you a big surprise. You did not guess—did you?—that I have been in Paris for a fortnight. I left Lyons without telling anyone—I just bolted. You know, that awful town was too boring, particularly since you went away.

“I arrived here with thirty francs and five or six letters from the Curé of St. Nizier’s. Fortunately, Providence was at once kind to me and led me to an old Marquis, who has engaged me as his secretary. We are publishing his memoirs. I have nothing to do but to write at his dictation, and earn hundred francs a month by this work. It is not a considerable income, as you see; but calculating all expenses, I hope that I shall be able to send something home from time to time.

“My dear Daniel—what a lovely city, this Paris is! Here at least there is not always a fog; it does rain sometimes, but it is a light and jolly rain, mixed up with sunshine, as I have never seen elsewhere. And I have actually become quite a different person—you ought to see me! I never cry now, it is incredible.”

I had read so far, when all of a sudden the sound of carriage wheels crunching over the snow came from the street. The carriage stopped at the gate of the College and I heard the boys shouting at the top of their voices :

“ The Subprefect, the Subprefect ! ”<sup>1</sup>

A visit from this official evidently portended something unusual. He hardly ever came to Sarlande College, not more than once or twice a year, and then it was a great event. But just then the letter from my brother Jack was more interesting to me than anything else, and much dearer to my heart than the Subprefect of Sarlande or the whole of Sarlande itself. So I returned to my corner, and while the boys, whose spirits were roused, fought battles for the windows, in order to see the Subprefect, I took up my letter once more.

“ I suppose you know, Daniel, that father is in Brittany, selling cider on behalf of a Company. When he learnt that I was the secretary of a Marquis, he wanted me to obtain an order for a few casks of cider from him. Unfortunately the Marquis drinks only wine, and only Spanish wine at that ! I wrote to father and told him so, do you know what he replied ? ‘ Jack, you are an ass ! ’—as usual. But it does not matter, my dear Daniel, I believe that actually he is very fond of me. As to Mummy, you know that she is alone

<sup>1</sup> Subprefect : in France, the official in charge of the administration of a district.—*Tr.*

now. You ought to write to her; she complains of your silence.

"I forgot to tell you something that you will surely be very pleased to hear; my room is in the *Quartier Latin*.<sup>1</sup> In the *Quartier Latin*, just imagine! It is a real poet's room, exactly like those in the novels, with a small window and roofs as far as you can see. The bed is not large, but at a pinch it would hold the two of us; and then there is a desk in a corner, very suitable for writing poetry. I am sure you would want to come and see me at once, in order to see all this; I too should like to have you with me, and I am not at all sure that I shall not send you an invitation one of these days.

"In the meantime remember me and do not work too much in your college, or else you might fall ill.

"With love, your brother

"Jack."

Good old Jack! How sweetly his letter had hurt me. I was laughing and crying at the same time. My whole life of these last months consisting of punch, billiards, *Café Barquette*—seemed like a bad dream, and I thought: "Well! that is over now. Henceforth I shall work, I shall be courageous, like Jack."

Just then the bell rang. My pupils lined up; they were talking a great deal about the Subprefect and pointed excitedly to his

<sup>1</sup> *Quartier Latin*: students' and artists' quarter in Paris.—*Tr.*

carriage waiting at the gate, as we walked past. I handed them over to the professors; once rid of them, I dashed towards the stairs. I was very anxious to be alone in my room with the letter from Jack.

"Monsieur Daniel, you are wanted in the Principal's office."

The Principal? What could the Principal want with me?.. The doorkeeper was looking at me in a strange way. Suddenly the Subprefect came back to my mind.

"Is the Subprefect still upstairs?" I asked.

And I started to climb the stairs four at a time; my heart was beating high with expectation.

At times one is almost mad. Do you know what I fancied when I heard that the Subprefect was waiting for me? I thought that he had noticed my pleasant looks at the Prize Distribution and that he had come to the school on purpose to engage me as his secretary. This appeared to me as the most natural thing in the world. Jack's letter with his stories of aged noblemen had muddled my brain, I suppose.

However that may be, my certainty grew as I climbed the stairs. Secretary to the Subprefect! I was in transports.

At the turn of the passage I met Roger. He was very white; he looked at me as if he wanted to speak, but I did not stop: the Subprefect could not be kept waiting.

I assure you that my heart was beating very fast when I reached the Principal's

study. Secretary to the Subprefect! . . . I was obliged to stop for an instant to recover my breath; I arranged my tie, gave my hair a little brush-up with my fingers, and gently turned the door-knob.

Could I have known what was in store for me! The Subprefect was standing, leaning casually against the marble mantelpiece, and smiling between his fair side-whiskers. The Principal stood humbly at his side, clad in a dressing gown and holding a velvet skull-cap in his hands, and M. Viot, who had been summoned in haste, was trying to conceal himself in a corner.

As soon as I entered, the Subprefect remarked:

"So this is the gentleman who is good enough to seduce our housemaids?"

He uttered this sentence in a clear and ironical voice, without dropping his smile. I thought at first that he was joking and made no reply; but the Subprefect was not joking. After a short silence he resumed:

"Have I not the honour to address Monsieur Daniel Eysette? the gentleman who has seduced my wife's maid?"

I did not know what he meant; but at the word housemaid flung into my face for the second time, I blushed with shame and exclaimed quite indignantly:

"A housemaid—I! I have never seduced any housemaid."

I saw a flash of contempt burst from the Principal's glasses at this answer, and heard



the keys murmuring in their corner; "What an impudence!"

The Subprefect on the other hand was still smiling; he took from the mantelpiece a bundle of papers which I had not noticed so far, and waving them carelessly, he turned to me.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have here serious evidence of your guilt. These are letters which have been recovered from the young woman in question. It is true that they bear no signature and also that the housemaid would not give any names. But in these letters the College is repeatedly mentioned and—unfortunately for you—M. Viot has recognized your handwriting and your style."

Here the keys rattled fiercely, and the Subprefect added, still smiling:

"There are not many poets at Sarlande College."

At these words a thought flashed through my mind: I wanted to look closely at those papers. I dashed forward; the Principal, fearing a scandal, wanted to hold me back. But the Subprefect quietly held out the bundle.

"Look!" he said.

Merciful God! My correspondence with Cecilia.

All my letters were there. From the one beginning: "Oh Cecilia, at times in the rocky wilderness..."—to the song of thanksgiving: "Angel who descended from heaven to pass a night on the earth..." And fancy that I had laid all these sweet flowers of love rhetoric at

the feet of a servant girl! Fancy that this lady, whose position was so high, etc.... scraped every morning the mud from Madame Subprefect's goloshes! You can imagine my fury, my dismay.

"Well, what have you got to say, Sir Don Juan?" sneered the Subprefect, after a moment's silence. "Are the letters yours or are they not?"

Instead of answering, I hung my head. A single word would have exculpated me; but I did not utter a word. I was prepared to endure anything, rather than denounce Roger... For you must note that in the midst of this catastrophe little Thingummy had not for a single moment doubted the honesty of his friend. When he recognized the letters, he said to himself: "Roger must have been too lazy to copy them; he would rather play one more game of billiards and send off my letters instead."—Innocent little Thingummy!

When the Subprefect saw that I would not reply, he pocketed the letters and turned to the Principal and his acolyte:

"And now, gentlemen, you know what you have to do."

At this M. Viot's keys jingled lugubriously, and the Principal answered, bowing down to the ground, "M. Eysette had deserved to be dismissed at once; but he would be permitted to stay at the College for eight more days, so as to avoid any scandal." Just as long as it would take to get a new master.

At the terrible word "dismissed" the whole of my courage deserted me. I bowed without a word and hastily left that room. I was hardly outside when tears burst from my eyes. I darted off to my room, stifling my sobs in my handkerchief.

Roger was waiting for me; he looked intensely worried and was striding up and down in the room.

When he saw me in the door, he came to me :

" M. Daniel ! "

And he looked at me questioningly. I dropped on a chair without replying.

" Tears ! childish nonsense ! " the fencing master continued in a brutal tone, " this does not mean anything. Come on, quick ! what happened ? "

I described the whole horrible scene, with all its details.

As I went on talking, I saw Roger's features brighten; he dropped his arrogant air, and when he learnt at last how I had suffered myself to be dismissed from the College rather than betray him, he held out both hands and said simply :

" Daniel, you are a noble soul. "

At this moment, we heard the noise of a carriage in the street; the Subprefect was leaving.

" You are a noble soul, " continued my good friend, the fencing master, gripping my hands as if he wanted to crush them, " you are a noble soul, that's all I can say . . . But

you will understand that I cannot allow anybody to sacrifice himself for me."

Saying this, he moved to the door.

"Do not cry, M. Daniel; I shall go to the Principal and I swear that it is not you who will be dismissed."

He made another step towards the door; then he came back to me as if he had forgotten something.

"One more thing before I go," he said in a low voice, "listen to me; big Roger is not alone in this world; somewhere in a corner he has an invalid mother. A saintly mother! poor woman... Promise me that you will write to her when everything is over."

He said this gravely, quietly, and his tone frightened me.

"What are you going to do?" I exclaimed.

Roger did not reply; but he opened his coat a little to show me the gleaming butt of a pistol in his pocket.

I ran to him, quite upset.

"Kill yourself, unfortunate man, you want to kill yourself?"

And he replied very coldly:

"My dear fellow, when I was in the Army, I promised myself this: If I should ever lose my rank through some folly of my own, I shall not survive my dishonour. Now the time has come to keep my word. In five minutes I shall be turned out from the College, that is to say, degraded; an hour later—good-bye to this world!"

On hearing this, I planted myself resolutely in front of the door.

"Well then, Roger, you will not leave this room. . . I will rather lose my post than be the cause of your death."

"Let me do my duty," he said fiercely.

And overcoming my resistance, he succeeded in half opening the door.

Then I thought of reminding him of his mother, of his poor mother who lived somewhere in a corner. I proved to him that he had to live for her, that I should easily find another post, that we had in any case eight days before us, and that one should at least wait until the last moment before taking such a terrible step. . . This last argument seemed to move him. He agreed to put off his visit to the Principal and that which had to follow an hour later.

Thereupon the bell rang, we embraced, and I went downstairs to the school.

Strange, weak human nature! I had gone to my room in despair; when I left it I was almost cheerful. . . Little Thingummy was so proud of having saved the life of his good friend, the fencing master.

However, once I was seated at my desk and the first glow of enthusiasm had died down, I must admit that I began to reflect. Roger consented to live, that was all right; but what would become of me after my noble self-sacrifice had turned me out from the College?

The situation was not pleasant: I could

already see the homestead seriously endangered, my mother in tears and M. Eysette in great anger. Fortunately I remembered Jack; how clever of his letter to have arrived precisely that morning! After all, it was quite simple; did he not tell me that there was room enough in his bed for two? And then you can always earn your living in Paris. . . .

At this point an awful hitch occurred to me: I needed money if I wanted to leave. First of all for the railway fare, then I owed 58 francs to the doorkeeper, then ten francs I had borrowed from a senior boy, then enormous sums put down to my account at the Café Barbette. How was it possible to procure all this money?

"Oh well," I said to myself, "I am really silly to worry for so little; Roger will help me. Roger is rich, he gives private lessons, and he will be only too glad to provide me with a few hundred francs, since I had saved his life."

Having thus settled everything, I forgot all about the day's calamities and thought only of my great journey to Paris. I felt very cheerful—I could hardly keep still; and M. Viot, who came to the study hall in order to enjoy my despondency, looked intensely disappointed at the sight of my merry countenance. At table, I ate fast and with appetite; in the courtyard I remitted all punishments. At last the bell rang for lessons.

The most urgent thing was to see Roger; I made a dash to his room. He was not there. "Good!" I thought, "he must have gone to

look in at the Café Barbette,"—which did not surprise me at all, in spite of the dramatic occurrences.

There was no Roger at the Café Barbette.

Roger, I was told, had gone to the Prairie with the soldiers.

What the devil did they want to go there for in this weather? I began to feel rather anxious and refusing an invitation to a game of billiards, I tucked up my trousers and ran out into the snow, towards the Prairie, to search for my good friend, the fencing master.

## XII. THE IRON RING

THE Prairie is distant from the gates of Sarlande by a good half-mile; but at the pace I went, I must have arrived there in less than a quarter of an hour. I was rather anxious for Roger. I feared that the poor fellow had told the Principal everything, in spite of his promise, while I was in the schoolroom; I recalled the gleam of his pistol. This gloomy vision gave me wings.

However, I saw at intervals the prints of many feet in the snow, directed towards the Prairie, and the thought that the fencing master was not alone gave me some comfort.

So I slowed down and thought of Paris, of Jack, of my departure. But soon my fears returned :

"Evidently Roger is going to kill himself. For what other purpose should he have come to this deserted place, so far from the town? He has brought his friends with him; he wants to bid them farewell, to drink the stirrup-cup together, as they call it. . . Oh, these soldiers!" And I ran again as fast as my legs could carry me.

Fortunately I was now quite near the Prairie; I could see the great snow-covered trees. "My poor friend!" I was thinking, "I hope I shall be in time!"

The footprints led me to the Espéron tavern.

This was a shady tavern, a place of ill-repute, where the debauchees of the town sought their secret pleasures. I had visited it more than once in company of the noble souls, but I had never found it as sinister-looking as today. Yellow and dirty in the immaculate whiteness of the field, it lay in hiding behind a coppice of small elms, with its low door, its dilapidated walls and ill-washed window-panes, as if ashamed of the ugly trade that was its calling.

As I came nearer I heard a cheerful noise of voices, laughter and clinking of glasses.

"My God," I shuddered, "the stirrup-cup!" and stopped to recover my breath.

I was now behind the tavern: I pushed open the back gate and walked into the garden. What a garden! A tall bare hedge, lilac bushes without a leaf, refuse heaps on the snow, and small snow-covered arbours,



which looked like igloos. It was a sight to sadden your soul.

The racket came from the ground-floor room and apparently the party was getting hot for in spite of the cold, both the windows had been thrown wide open.

I was putting my foot on the doorstep when I heard something that froze me on the spot; my own name, uttered between loud bursts of laughter. Roger was talking of me and strangely enough, each time the name of Daniel Eysette was mentioned, the others roared with laughter.

I fell back, gripped by a painful curiosity; I felt that I was about to learn some extraordinary thing. Nobody had heard me, thanks to the snow which muffled the sound of my steps like a carpet, and I slipped into one of the arbours, very conveniently situated just below the windows.

I shall remember that arbour all my life; I shall remember the dead leaves which lined its walls, the dirty muddy ground, the small table, painted in green, the dripping wooden benches. Daylight hardly filtered through the snow-covered roof; slowly the snow was melting and fell drop by drop upon my head.

It was in that arbour, dark and cold as a grave, that I learnt how evil and cowardly men can be; it was there that I learnt to suspect, to despise, to hate. . . . May God keep all of you, who are reading these pages, from setting foot in that arbour. . . . I stood there, holding my breath, blushing with anger and

shame, and listened to the voices in Espéron's tavern.

My good friend the fencing master was the speaker. He related the adventure with Cecilia, the exchange of love letters, the Sub-prefect's visit to the College and demonstrated everything with flourishes and gestures which must have been very comical indeed, judging by the outbursts of merriment from the audience.

"You see, my little dears," he said in swaggering tones, "it's not for nothing that I have been three years on the stage of the Zouaves' theatre. . . . My word! I thought for an instant that I had lost the game, and could say good-bye to our parties and old father Espéron's good wine. Little Eysette had said nothing, it is true; but there was still ample time for him to speak, and between you and me, I believe he just wanted to let me have the honour of denouncing myself. . . . So I said to myself: "Watch your step, Roger, and go ahead with the great scene!"

Then my good friend the fencing master started to enact what he called the great scene, that is to say all that had happened that morning between him and me, in my room.

The wretch! He forgot nothing—"My mother, my poor mother!" he cried in dramatic accents. . . . Then he imitated my voice: "No, Roger! you are not going to leave this room!" The great scene was indeed highly comical and the entire audience rolled with

laughter. Large tears ran down my cheeks; I was shivering, my ears were tingling; I guessed the whole hideous comedy of that morning, I understood vaguely that Roger had on purpose despatched my letters, so as to shield himself against mishap, that his mother, his poor mother, had been dead for twenty years and that I had taken his pipe case for the butt of a pistol.

"And what about the pretty Cecilia?" asked one of the noble souls.

"Cecilia has kept quiet, and has packed her box, like a good girl."

"And little Daniel? what is he going to do?"

"Pshaw!" answered Roger with a gesture at which everybody laughed.

At this burst of laughter I went mad. I had a mind to rush out of the arbour and appear suddenly in their midst, like a ghost. But I controlled myself—I had already been ridiculous enough. . . .

The roast was being served, glasses were clinking.

"To Roger's health! Roger!" they shouted.

I could not bear it any longer. I did not care whether I was seen—I started off through the garden. With one bound I cleared the gate and ran on like a mad man.

I ran on for some time, like a wounded kid; and if broken hearts and bleeding hearts were anything more than figures of speech used by poets, I swear that a long trail of

blood would have been found where I went over the snowbound plain.

I was lost. Where should I find the money? How should I go away? How could I join my brother? To denounce Roger would have been useless—he could deny everything, now that Cecilia had left. . . . Exhausted, overwhelmed with fatigue and despair, I sank down at last into the snow, under a chestnut-tree. May be I should have remained there until the morrow, crying, unable to think; but suddenly I heard a clock strike, far, very far away, from the direction of Sarlande. . . . It was the College clock. I had forgotten everything: but this sound called me back to life—I had to return, to watch the pupils' recreation in the "Hall". . . . at the thought of the Hall an idea rose to my mind. At once my tears dried; I felt stronger and calmer. I rose, and with the deliberate step of the man who has taken an irrevocable decision, I resumed my way to Sarlande.

If you wish to know what irrevocable decision little Thingummy had formed, follow him over the wide snowy plain to Sarlande; follow him through the dark muddy streets of the town; follow him under the College porch; follow him into the Hall at recreation time and note his strange persistence in looking at the large iron ring which dangles overhead; when recreation is over, follow him into the study hall, ascend with him the steps of his pulpit and glance amidst his shoulder to

to read the anguished letter he is writing amidst the uproar of the mutinous class :

“ Monsieur J. Eysette,  
rue Bonaparte, Paris.

“Forgive me, my dear Jack, the grief I am going to cause you. You were not crying any more—and I shall make you cry again. . . . It will be for the last time, however. When you will receive this letter, your poor Daniel will be dead.”

At this point the uproar increases; little Thingummy interrupts his letter and deals out a few punishments to the right and left, but he does it quietly, without anger. Then he resumes :

“ You see, Jack, I have been too unhappy. I could not find any way but to kill myself. My career is gone; I have been dismissed from the College—because of a love affair, too long a story to tell you now . . . Then, I have incurred debts, I cannot work any more, I am ashamed, I am wearied, I am disgusted, I am afraid of life . . . I would rather go.”

Again little Thingummy is forced to stop :

“ Five hundred lines to be copied, Sou-beyrol! Fouque and Loupé: in detention on Sunday!”

When this is done, he concludes his letter :

“ Good-bye, Jack. I should like to tell you more, but I feel that I shall cry, and the boys are looking at me. Tell mother that I have

slipped from a rock on an excursion, or that I have been drowned while skating. Invent any story you like; but never let her know the truth! Give my dear mother a kiss from me, and also to father, and try to build a new home for them soon... Good-bye! I love you fondly. Remember your

“Daniel.”

As soon as this letter is finished little Thingummy begins another one, which says:

“Reverend Father, I beg you to see that the letter I am leaving for my brother Jack reaches him. Please also cut off a lock of my hair and send it to mother.

“I ask your forgiveness for the pain I am causing you. I have killed myself because I was too unhappy here. You alone, Reverend Father, have always shown me great kindness. I thank you.

“Daniel Eysette.”

Then little Thingummy puts this letter and the one for Jack into a large envelope and writes on it the following words: “The person who will be the first to find my dead body is requested to hand this over to Abbé Germane.” And all his business being ended, he calmly awaits the time to leave the schoolroom.

The students’ work is over. Supper follows, then prayers; and everybody goes upstairs to the dormitories.

The boys go to bed; little Thingummy walks up and down, waiting for them to fall

asleep. Now M. Viot makes his rounds; you can hear a mysterious jingle of keys and the soft tread of slippers on the wooden floor.

"Good evening, M. Viot" whispers little Thingummy.

"Good evening," the Superintendent replies in a low voice.

Then he passes on, his footsteps are lost in the corridor.

Little Thingummy is alone. Softly he opens the door and pauses for an instant on the landing, to see whether the boys are awake; but everything is quiet in the dormitory. Then he goes downstairs, moving on tiptoe along the walls, in the dark. The north wind whispers sadly under the doors. He reaches the foot of the staircase and passing the peristyle, looks out into the courtyard; it lies under a white blanket of snow between the four high buildings, deep in darkness.

High up under the roof a light is awake: Abbé Germane is working on his great book.... From the depth of his heart little Thingummy sends a last, a very sincere greeting to the good priest: then he enters the Hall.

The gymnasium of the ancient Naval School is filled with cold and sinister darkness. Faint moonlight trickles through one of the windows and falls directly upon the big iron ring—that iron ring of which little Thingummy has been thinking for hours—and it gleams like silver. An old stool stands in a corner. Little Thingummy fetches it, and

puts it under the iron ring, then he mounts it; he has not been mistaken, it has just the right height. . . . Then he loosens his tie, a long tie of violet silk, which he wears twisted round his neck like a ribbon. He fastens the tie to the ring and makes a noose. . . . The clock strikes one. Go on! you have to die . . . with trembling hands Little Thingummy opens the noose. He is in a kind of fever. Good-bye, Jack! Good bye, Madame Eysette! . . .

Suddenly, he feels the grasp of a steely fist. He is seized by the waist and lifted from the stool. At the same time a rough and jocular voice, a well-known voice, says to him :

"What an idea to do acrobatics at this hour of the night!"

Stupefied, little Thingummy turns round.

It is Abbé Germane, Abbé Germane without his cassock, in knee-breeches, with his collar open and hanging down on his waistcoat. There is a sad smile on his fine ugly face, half-lit by the moon. One hand has been sufficient to lift the suicide from the stool, with the other he is still holding his water jug which he had gone to fill at the courtyard fountain.

At the sight of little Thingummy's haggard face and streaming eyes Abbé Germane has ceased to smile, and his voice is soft and almost tender as he repeats :

"What a strange idea to do acrobatics at this hour, my dear Daniel!"

Little Thingummy is scarlet-red and confused.



—“ I am not doing acrobatics, Reverend Father, I want to die.”

—“ How is that? to die? . . . . So you are in sore trouble?”

—“ Oh!” moans little Thingummy, and big burning tears roll over his cheeks.

—“ Daniel, you are coming with me,” says the priest.

Little Daniel shakes his head and points to the iron ring with the tie. . . . Father Germane takes his hand :

“ Look here! come up to my room; if you want to kill yourself, very well! you can kill yourself there. I have got a fire; it is nice and warm up there.”

But little Thingummy resists.

“ Let me die, Father. You have no right to prevent me from dying.”

An angry look flashes from the priest's eyes.

“ Oh, is that so? ” he says.

And roughly grasping little Thingummy by the belt, he carries him off under his arm, like a bundle—despite his struggle and his entreaties.

We are in Abbé Germane's room now. There is a good fire in the grate on a table, near the fire, a lamp burns, pipes and heaps of papers all covered with scrawls, lie about.

Little Thingummy is sitting near the fireplace. He is very agitated, he talks a great deal, he relates his life, his misfortunes and why he has wanted to make an end of it all. The priest listens, smiling. Then, when the

boy has talked and wept his fill and unburdened his poor wounded heart, the dear man takes his hands in his and says very calmly :

“These are trifles, my boy, and it would have been very stupid to end your life for so little. Your story is very simple indeed : you have been dismissed from the College—which is, by the way, a very good thing for you. . . . Very well ! you must go, and go at once, without waiting until your eight days are over. You are not a cook, after all ! . . . . As to your journey, and your debts, do not worry. I shall lend you the money you wanted to borrow from that blackguard. . . . We shall settle everything to-morrow. And now, be quiet ! I have to work ; and you have to sleep. But I do not want you to return to your hideous bedroom ; you would be cold and scared there ; you are going to lie down in my bed ; look at the nice white sheets, fresh from the laundry ! . . . . I shall be writing all night ; and if I feel sleepy I shall stretch myself on the sofa. . . . Good night ! now don’t talk to me.”

Little Thingummy does not resist, he goes to lie down. . . . Everything that happens is like a dream. What a lot of events in a single day ! To have been so near to death, and then to lie again in a soft bed, in this warm and peaceful room ! . . . Little Thingummy feels so well. . . . From time to time he opens his eyes to see dear Abbé Germane under the soft light of the shaded lamp smoking his pipe and

running his pen over the white pages, sheet by sheet, with a little scratching noise.

Next morning I was awakened by Abbé Germane patting my shoulder. I had forgotten everything overnight. . . . At this my rescuer laughed heartily.

"Come on, my boy," he said, "hurry up, the bell is ringing; nobody will have noticed anything, go to fetch your pupils as usual. During midday recreation I shall wait for you here, and we can talk."

All of a sudden I remembered. I wanted to thank him; but the good Abbé positively turned me out of his room.

I need not tell you that the morning seemed very long to me. The boys were hardly in the courtyard when I was already knocking at Abbé Germane's door. I found him sitting at his desk; the drawers were wide open and he was busy counting gold coins, which he carefully laid out in small heaps.

When he heard me come in, he looked round and then went back to his work, without saying a word. Having finished, he closed the drawers and beckoned to me, with a kindly smile.

"All this is for you," he told me. "I have made your accounts. This is for the journey, this for the Café Barbette, this for the student who has lent you ten francs. . . . I had put this money aside to pay a substitute for my young brother:<sup>1</sup> but he won't draw lots for another

<sup>1</sup> This refers to recruitment for the Army. Until 1872, when the replacing of recruits was abolished by law, recruits—chosen

six years; and in the meantime we shall have met again."

I wanted to say something, but that devil of a man gave me no chance.

"Now, my boy, say good-bye . . . the bell is ringing for my lesson, and I don't want to find you here when I come back. The air of this Bastille is not good for you. . . . Off you go to Paris, work hard, pray to God, smoke a pipe, and try to be a man. Do you understand? try to be a man; for, you see, my boy Daniel, you are still a child and I fear very much that you will remain a child for the rest of your life."

Thereupon he opened his arms to me, there was a divine smile on his face; but I threw myself sobbing to his feet. He raised me and kissed me on both cheeks.

The bell was ringing out the last note.

"There! I shall be late," he said gathering up his books and papers in a hurry.

On the threshold he turned round once more :

"I too have a brother in Paris, whom you could look up—he is a good fellow and a priest. . . . But never mind! half crazy as you are, you might go and forget his address. . . ."

And leaving it at that, he walked down the stairs, with his long strides. His cassock fluttered behind him; he was holding his cap with his right hand and under the left arm

he carried a big bundle of old books and papers. . . . Dear Abbé Germane!

Before leaving, I cast a last look around his room; I gazed for the last time on the big library, the small table, the fire which had almost gone out, the armchair in which I had cried so bitterly, the bed in which I had slept so well; and as I thought of this mysterious being, which, held so much courage, hidden kindness, sacrifice and resignation, I could not help blushing for my cowardice; and I solemnly promised myself that I should always remember Abbé Germane.

But time was passing. . . . I had to pack my trunk, to pay my debts, to reserve my seat on the stage-coach.

As I was leaving the room, I noticed on the corner of the mantelpiece several old, blackened pipes. I took the oldest, blackest, and the shortest, and put it in my pocket for a relic. Then I went out.

Downstairs the door of the old gymnasium was still half open. I could not help glancing in as I passed by, and what I saw made me shiver.

I saw the great Hall, dark and cold, the gleaming iron ring, and my violet tie with the noose, swinging in the breeze above the overturned stool.

### XIII *MONSIEUR VIOT'S KEYS*

As I was hurriedly leaving the College, still much affected by that awful sight, the door of the doorkeeper's lodge suddenly flew open and a voice called my name.

"Monsieur Eysette! Monsieur Eysette!"

It was the Proprietor of the Café Barbette and his worthy friend, M. Cassagne, both looking upset and rather insolent.

The publican spoke first:

—"Is it true that you are leaving, M. Eysette?"

—"Yes, M. Barbette," I answered calmly, "I am actually leaving to-day."

M. Barbette jumped, and so did M. Cassagne; but M. Barbette's jump was very much higher than M. Cassagne's, as I owed him much more money.

—"What! to-day!"

—"Yes, to-day: and I am in a hurry to reserve my seat on the stage-coach."

I thought they were going to fly at my throat.

—"And what about my money?" asked M. Barbette.

—"And what about mine?" screamed M. Cassagne.

I entered the lodge without replying and gravely took out from my pockets Abbé Germane's shining gold coins, in handfuls; and on the edge of the table I counted out the money I owed to both.

The effect was dramatic. The two scowling faces relaxed as if by magic; they pocketed their money, somewhat ashamed of the apprehensions they had shown me and very pleased with the payment. Then they expanded into polite condolences and professions of friendship.

—"You are really leaving us, M. Eysette? . . . Oh, what a pity. . . . What a loss for the school!"

And so many expressions of friendliness, "Oh!" and "Ah!" and "What a pity!" and sighs and shaking of hands and shedding of tears. . . .

Even yesterday I might have been taken in by this show of kindness but now I was well versed in matters of sentiment.

The lesson of the arbour had taught me something about human nature—so, at least, I believed, and the more ingratiating those two hideous tipplers became, the more my disgust for them grew. So I cut short their ridiculous effusions and hastened to reserve my seat on the blessed stage-coach which would take me away from all these scoundrels.

Returning from the stage-coach office I passed the Café Barbette; I did not enter—I had a horror of the place. But I looked in through the window, impelled by some unwholesome curiosity. The café was full of people; it was a pool day for billiards. Through the clouds of pipe smoke I could see the flashing red pompons of the soldiers' shakos and the sword-belts shining on the hooks.

The noble souls were gathered in full strength; only the fencing master was absent.

I looked for some time at the heavy red faces multiplied in the mirrors, at the absinthe sparkling in the glasses, at the carved decanters full of brandy; and the thought that I had lived in this cesspool brought a blush to my face. . . . I remembered little Thingummy loitering about the billiard tables, recording the scores, paying for the punch humiliated, despised, becoming more and more depraved, and mumbling away all the time at the stem of a pipe or crooning a barrackyard ditty. . . . This vision was even more appalling than the one I had in the gymnasium when I saw the little violet tie dangling in the air. I fled from the place.

As I made my way towards the College, followed by the man from the stage-coach who was to carry my trunk, the fencing master appeared with sprightly step, hat askew, a whip in hand, his glorious moustache reflected in his shining boots. From a distance I looked at him with admiration, and thought: "What a pity that so handsome a man should have so ugly a soul!"

He too had noticed me and came towards me with a broad loyal smile and outstretched arms. . . . Oh, that arbour!

"I was looking for you," he told me, "What is that I hear? You . . ."

He stopped abruptly. My look froze the lying phrases on his lips. And in this straight and steady look the wretched man must have



read a good many things, for he suddenly grew pale, stammered, lost his composure—but only for a short instant. He immediately recovered his flashing air, fixed upon me two eyes which were as bright and cold as steel, and thrusting his hands into his pockets walked resolutely away, muttering that people who had any complaints should say so to one's face.

Ruffian, begone!

When I arrived at the College the boys were in class. We went up to my attic. The man carried the trunk on his shoulders and went downstairs. I remained for a few moments in that chilly room, looking, at the bare and dirty walls, at the slashed and stained writing desk, and through the narrow window into the courtyard where the plane trees swayed their snow-covered crowns. . . . Silently I said good-bye to this chapter of the past.

At that moment I heard the rumble of a thundering voice in the school: Abbé Germane's voice. It warmed my heart and brought forth a few affectionate tears to my eyes.

Then I started slowly downstairs, looking attentively around, as if to take away in my eyes the image, the whole image, of this place that I was never to see again. Thus I passed through the long corridors with the high barred windows, where the dark eyes had appeared to me for the first time. God bless you, my sweet Dark Eyes! . . . I passed the Principal's study with its mysterious double

door; then, a few steps farther, M. Viot's office. There I halted abruptly. . . . Oh joy, oh delight! The keys, the dreadful keys were hanging from the lock, gently swinging in the breeze. I looked at them with a kind of religious awe; then all of a sudden the thought of vengeance came to me. Treacherously I put out a sacrilegious hand, withdrew the bunch from the lock, and hiding it under my coat, ran down the steps, four at a time.

At the far end of the Intermediates' courtyard there was a very deep well. I made a dash for it. The courtyard was deserted at that hour; the spectacled witch had not yet raised the curtains of her window. Circumstances were favourable to my crime. So I took the keys, the terrible keys which had tormented me so much, from under my coat and hurled them into the well with all my strength . . . Frink! frink! frink! I heard them tumble down, rebound from the walls and splash heavily into the water which swallowed them. Having committed the crime I took myself off, smiling.

As I was leaving the school the last person whom I met under the porch was M. Viot—but a M. Viot without keys, haggard, distracted, running aimlessly to and fro. As he passed me he cast an anguished look at me. The unfortunate man wanted to ask me whether I had seen them . . . Just then the doorkeeper called out from the top of the staircase,

“M. Viot, I can't find them!”

I heard the man of the keys groaning :

"Oh, my God!"

And he darted off like a mad man to continue the search.

I should have gladly stopped to enjoy this spectacle longer, but the stage-coach bugle was calling in the Square and I did not want to be left behind.

And now, farewell for ever, vast dingy college, made of old iron and blackened stones! farewell, nasty schoolboys! farewell, merciless "Regulations!" Little Thingummy flees and will never return. And you, Marquis de Boucoyran, deem yourself lucky; your adversary goes and will never bring home to you the famous sword thrust long since planned with the noble souls of the Café Barbette . . .

Start, Coachman! Sing out, bugle! Good old stage-coach, let the sparks fly from your wheels, carry off little Thingummy as fast as your three horses will gallop. Carry him quickly to his home-town, that he may kiss his mother at Uncle Baptiste's, and then set his course towards Paris and join as quickly as possible Eysette (Jack) in his room in the Quartier Latin!

#### XIV    *UNCLE BAPTISTE*

WHAT a strange character, this uncle Baptiste, Madame Eysette's brother! Neither good nor bad, married at an early age to a tall gendarme of a wife, a lean and stingy woman of whom he was afraid, this aged child had only one passion in the world: a passion for colours. For some forty years he lived surrounded by little pots, brushes, paintboxes, and spent his time colouring the pictures he found in illustrated papers. The house was full of old *Illustrations*, old *Charivaris*, old *Pictorials*, and maps, all heavily embellished. In times of penury, when my aunt refused him money to buy illustrated journals, my uncle went so far as to colour books. This is a historical fact: I have held in my own hands a Spanish Grammar which my uncle had illuminated from end to end, the adjectives in blue, the substantives in pink, and so on.

It was with this old maniac and his formidable better half that poor Madame Eysette had been forced to live for six months. Day after day the unhappy woman spent in her brother's room, sitting by his side and striving to make herself useful. She wiped his brushes, filled the cups . . . The saddest part of it was that since our ruin uncle Baptiste held M. Eysette in deep contempt; and my poor mother was condemned to hear from morning till night: "Eysette is not serious, Eysette is

not dependable." The old idiot! he said this in an incredibly sententious and impressive manner, while busily colouring his Spanish Grammar. Since then I have often met in life with these supposedly grave men, who employed their time illuminating Spanish Grammars and found that the others were not serious.

I learnt all these details about Uncle Baptiste and the gloomy life Madame Eysette led in his house, at a much later date; I understood however as soon as I set foot in the place that my mother could not have been happy there, despite whatever she might say about it.

When I arrived, they had just sat down to dinner. Madame Eysette started with pleasure at seeing me and hugged her little Thingummy with all her strength, as you can well imagine. Yet the poor woman appeared to be ill at ease; she spoke little—still in her usual gentle, trembling voice, and kept her eyes fixed on her plate. It hurt me to see her thus, in her shabby black dress. The welcome extended to me by my uncle and aunt was very cold. My aunt asked me with anxious look whether I had dined. I hastened to reply that I had . . . She looked relieved—she was worrying about her dinner. A nice dinner! codfish with chick-peas . . .

Uncle Baptiste also asked me a question: whether we had holidays. I replied that I had left the school and was on my way to join Jack, who had found me a good post in Paris. I invented this story in order to reassure poor

Madame Eysette about my future and also to look "serious" in my uncle's eyes.

When Aunt Baptiste heard that little Thingummy had a good post, she opened her eyes wide :

"Daniel," she said, "you must get your mother to join you in Paris. The poor dear feels too depressed without her sons; and then, you see what I mean, she is too much of a burden for us, and your uncle cannot always be the family's milch cow."

"That's a fact" said uncle Baptiste with his mouth full, "I *am* the milch cow."

He appeared to be delighted with the term "milch cow" and repeated it gravely several times.

Dinner was a long affair, as it is with old people. My mother ate little, spoke only a few words to me stealing an occasional stealthy glance for the aunt was watching her.

"Look at your sister!" she said to her husband. "The pleasure of having Daniel here is telling on her appetite; yesterday she had taken two pieces of bread but to-day only one."

Oh, dear Madame Eysette! how fervently I wished to take you away with me that very evening, to rescue you from that heartless milch cow and his consort! Alas! I myself was venturing forth with just enough money to pay for my journey, and I rather thought that Jack's room was not large enough for the three of us. Could I but have spoken to you, embraced you as I wished; but no! we were

not left alone for a minute . . . Do you remember? when dinner was over the uncle at once returned to his Spanish Grammar, the aunt polished her silverware and both watched us with surreptitious looks. Then it was time for me to go, and we had not been able to talk freely to each other.

And indeed little Thingummy's heart was very heavy when he left uncle Baptiste's house; and as he walked alone through the dark broad avenue which leads to the railway station, he vowed two or three times very solemnly that he would henceforth behave like a man and think of nothing but of the home he had to rebuild.

## *Part Two*





## I MY GALOSHES

SHOULD I live as long as Uncle Baptiste, who must be by now as old as an ancient Central African baobab, I shall never forget my first journey to Paris in a third class compartment.

It was about the end of February and still very cold. Outside, a grey sky, wind, sleet, bald hillocks, flooded meadows, long rows of dead vineyards; within, drunken sailors singing, stout peasants sleeping open-mouthed like dead fish, little old women with baskets, children, fleas, wet-nurses, all the paraphernalia of the poor people's railway carriage, with its smell of pipe tobacco, brandy, garlic sausage and mouldy straw. I can still remember that smell.

At the start I had settled down in a corner, by the window, so that I could look out at the sky; but at two miles from my hometown a military male nurse took my seat, on the plea of facing his wife, and there was little Thingummy, too shy to protest, condemned to travel 200 miles between this nasty stout man who smelt of linseed and a big woman from Champagne, as tall as a drum-major, who snored all the time on his shoulder.

The journey lasted two days. I sat for two days motionless on the same place, wedged between my two tormentors, looking fixedly before me, with clenched teeth. Having neither money nor provisions, I ate nothing

the whole way. Two days without food is a long time. I still had a two-franc piece, but I saved it anxiously, in case I should not find friend Jack at the station on my arrival in Paris, and despite my hunger I had the fortitude not to touch it. The devil of it was that people were eating a great deal in the carriage, all around me. There was under my legs a confoundedly large heavy basket, whence my neighbour, the male nurse, produced every now and then, assorted cold meats which he shared with his lady. The proximity of this basket made me very unhappy, especially on the second day. It was however not hunger which caused me the greatest discomfort on that awful journey. I had left Sarlande without any shoes, wearing only a pair of very thin galoshes, which served me there on my rounds through the dormitories. They were all right as galoshes go; but in winter, in a third class carriage . . . Lord! how cold I was. I could have cried. At night, when everybody was asleep, I took my feet cautiously between my hands and held them for whole hours, trying to bring back some warmth into them. Oh! if Madame Eysette had seen me . . .

And yet—despite the hunger which cramped his stomach, despite the cruel cold which wrung tears from his eyes, little Thingummy was very happy, and for nothing on earth would he have given up that seat, that half seat, between the snoring woman and the male nurse. At the end of all these sufferings there was Jack, there was Paris.

On the night of the second day, towards three o'clock in the morning, I woke up with a start. The train had stopped; the whole carriage was astir. The male nurse was saying to his wife :

"We are there."

"Where?" I asked, rubbing my eyes.

"Why, in Paris!"

I darted to the carriage door. No houses, nothing but bare open country, a few gas-lamps and here and there large heaps of coal; and far down in the distance a great red light and a vague rumble similar to the sound of the sea. A man with a small lantern walked from carriage to carriage, calling out : "Paris! Paris! Tickets please!"

Involuntarily I withdrew my head with a movement of fright. It was Paris.

Oh, great cruel city, how right little Thingummy was to fear you!

Five minutes later the train entered the station. Jack had been there for an hour. From far I could see his tall, slightly bent figure and his long telegraph-pole arms waving to me from behind the railings. In one bound I was with him.

"Jack! my brother!"

"My dear boy."

And our souls clung together with all the strength of our arms. Unfortunately railway stations have no arrangements for such moving embraces. There is a hall for luggage, but there is no such thing as a hall for emotions,

a hall for souls. People jostled us, trod on our feet.

"Move on, move on!" the men at the toll-gate were calling to us.

Jack said in a low voice: "Let us go, Daniel. To-morrow I shall send for your trunk."

And we went off arm in arm, our steps as light as our purses, towards the Quartier Latin.

Often since have I tried to recall the precise impression Paris gave me that night: but things, like people, assume a special physiognomy when we see them for the first time, a physiognomy that we cannot discover in them later on. I have never been able to reconstruct the face Paris showed me on my arrival. It seems now a hazy town that I had passed long ago, in my childhood, and never have seen again.

I remember a wooden bridge over a dark river, then a wide deserted quay and a vast garden along this quay. We stopped for an instant in front of that garden. Through the railings which enclosed it, we dimly saw sheds, lawns, pools, trees which glittered with frost.

"The Zoological Garden," said Jack. "There are a great many Polar bears, apes, snakes, hippopotamuses . . . ."

As a matter of fact there was a smell of wild beasts, and now and then a shrill cry or a hoarse growl came from the deep shadows. I stood close against my brother and looked

wide-eyed through the railings. This unknown city of Paris, to which I came at night, and the mysterious garden, fused into a single sensation of dread; I felt as if I had landed in a vast black cavern full of wild beasts which might spring at me. Fortunately I was not alone—Jack was there to protect me . . . . Oh Jack! why were you not always with me?

We walked for a long, long time through interminable dark streets. Then Jack halted suddenly in a small square in front of a church.

"Here we are at Saint-Germain-des-Prés," he said, "our room is up there."

"What! Jack, in the belfry?"

"Quite, in the belfry. Very convenient to know what time it is."

Jack was slightly exaggerating. He occupied a small attic in the house next to the church on the fifth or sixth floor, and his window looked upon the belfry of Saint Germain, just at the height of the dial.

I stepped into the room and uttered a cry of happiness:

"A fire! how wonderful."

And I ran at once to the fireplace and held out my feet to the flames, at the risk of melting my galoshes. Only then Jack noticed my strange footwear. He laughed a great deal.

"There are a number of famous men who had arrived in Paris in sabots, and they boast of it. You will be able to say that you arrived in galoshes; it's far more original. For the

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Germain-of-the-Fields—Tr.

time being put on these slippers and let's get busy with the pie."

With these words dear Jack pushed a small table in front of the fire—it had been waiting in the corner, with supper ready and served.

## II "COMING FROM THE CURÉ OF ST. NIZIER"

My God! how happy we were that night in Jack's room! What cheerful bright reflections the fire threw on the tablecloth! And the old wine from the sealed bottle, how sweetly it was scented with violets! And the pie, what a lovely golden-brown crust it had! Pies like that are not baked nowadays; you will never again drink such wine, my poor Eysette!

Jack, my brother Jack, sat facing me and poured wine into my glass; and whenever I looked up I saw his eyes, tender as the eyes of a mother, gently smiling at me. I for my part, was so happy to be there that I felt positively feverish. I went on talking and talking.

"Come on, eat!" said Jack, filling my plate.

But I still talked and did not eat. So he too began to prattle, in order to keep me silent, and told me at length, without pausing for

breath, all that he had done since we had last met, more than a year ago.

"When you had left," he began—and always he smiled his beautiful resigned smile when he spoke of the saddest things—"when you had left, the house became utterly gloomy. Father stopped working; he spent all his time in the store, cursing the revolutionaries and shouting that I was an ass, which did not improve matters in any way. Every morning detested bills arrived, every second day we had the bailiffs in the house. Every time the bell rang our hearts stopped beating . . . Really, you were lucky to have left in time.

"After a month of this frightful existence father left for Brittany, on behalf of the Wine Growers' Association, and Madame Eysette went to stay with uncle Baptiste. I saw them off, both of them. You can imagine what floods of tears I shed. . . . When they were gone all our old furniture was sold, yes, my boy, sold in the street under my eyes, at our door; and it is painful, you know, to see your home being broken up like that, piece by piece. We do not realize how much they are part of ourselves, all those things of wood and cloth that we have in our houses. Listen! when they took away the linen cupboard, you know—the one which has pink Cupids with violins on its panels, I felt like running after the buyer and shouting: 'Stop him!' You can understand it, can't you?

"Of our furniture I kept only a chair, a mattress and a broom; the broom was very



useful, as you shall see. I placed these treasures in a corner of our house in Lantern Street—the rent had been paid for two further months—and there I was all alone in that large, bare, curtainless flat. Oh my boy, what a gloomy life it was! Every night when I came home from the office I felt a renewed sorrow, a feeling of sad surprise at being alone between those four walls. I walked about from room to room, slamming the doors to make some noise.

“At times I thought that somebody called me from the store, and I cried: ‘I am coming!’

“When I went into mother’s room I always thought I should find her there, sitting sadly in her armchair by the window, with her knitting . . . .

“To crown my misery the cockroaches reappeared. The horrible little creatures, that we had fought so bitterly when we came to Lyons, had no doubt heard of your departure and attempted another invasion, far worse than the previous one. At first I tried to resist. I spent my evenings in the kitchen, my candle in one hand, my broom in the other, fighting like a lion, but always weeping. Unfortunately I was alone, and however much I struggled, things were not as they had been in Annie’s time. Besides, the cockroaches came in greater numbers too. I am sure that all the cockroaches in Lyons—and God knows how many there are in that nasty damp town!—had risen in a body to besiege our house. The

kitchen was black with cockroaches and I was forced to abandon it to them. Sometimes I watched them through the keyhole, with horror in my soul. There were thousands and thousands of them. You might think that the accursed things were content with what they had : oh no ! You don't know these Northerners. They are inveterate raiders. In spite of doors and locks they passed from the kitchen to the dining room where I had made my bed. I transferred it to the store, then to the drawing room. It's easy for you to laugh ! I should have liked to see you in my place.

"The damned cockroaches drove me from room to room, down to our old small room at the end of the passage. There they gave me two or three days of respite. Then I woke up one morning to find a hundred or so silently climbing up my broom, while another army was advancing in perfect order towards my bed. Deprived of my weapons, dislodged from my last fort, I could do nothing but flee. That's what I did. I abandoned chair, mattress and broom to the cockroaches and took myself off from that horrible house in Lantern Street, never to return there again.

"I spent a few more months in Lyons, and very long, very dark, very tearful months they were. At the office they called me Saint Magdalen. I never went out. I had not a single friend. Your letters were my only diversion . . . Daniel, my boy, what a lovely way you have of expressing yourself ! I am sure that you could write for the newspapers

if you wanted to. Not like me; you know, through having written dictations so long I have grown to be about as intelligent as a sewing machine. I could not possibly say anything in my own words. M. Eysette was quite right to tell me: 'Jack you are an ass.' After all it is not such a bad thing to be an ass. Asses are nice animals: patient, strong, hard-working, with stout backs and good hearts . . . But let me continue my story.

"In all your letters you spoke about reconstructing the home, and thanks to your eloquence I was also fired like you, with this great idea. Unfortunately what I earned in Lyons was hardly enough to keep me alive. Then the idea of embarking for Paris occurred to me. Once there, I thought, it would be easier for me to assist the family, and to find all the materials necessary for our great building enterprise. So I decided to leave; but I acted with caution. I did not want to drop on the pavements of Paris like a sparrow without feathers. That is all right for you, Daniel: there are special advantages provided for handsome boys . . . . But I—such a big blubberer!

"So I went to ask our friend, the Curé of St. Nizier's, for a few letters of introduction. He has excellent connections in the Faubourg Saint Germain.<sup>1</sup> He gave me letters, one for a Count, the other for a Duke. It was a good start, as you see. From there I betook myself to a tailor, who for the sake of my honest looks,

<sup>1</sup> Faubourg Saint Germain, aristocratic suburb in Paris.—Tr.

consented to make me on credit a beautiful black coat with accessories, trousers, waist-coat, etc. I put my letters of recommendation in my coat, my coat in a bag, and departed, with three Louis<sup>1</sup> in my pocket: 35 francs for the journey and 25 for what might come next.

"On the morrow of my arrival in Paris I was in the street at seven o'clock in the morning, dressed in a black suit and yellow gloves. For your guidance, young Daniel, I may tell you that what I was doing was highly ridiculous. In Paris at seven o'clock in the morning all black suits are in bed, or should be. I did not know this; and I was very proud to show off my black suit, marching through the wide streets in my new pumps. I also thought, that getting up early I should have a better chance of meeting my Lady Fortune. Another mistake: In Paris the Lady Fortune is not an early riser.

"So here I was, trotting through the Faubourg Saint Germain, with my letters of recommendation in my pocket.

"I went first to the Count in Rue de Lille; then to the Duke, at Rue Saint Guillaume. In both places I found the servants engaged in washing the courtyards and polishing the brass fittings of the bells. When I told these menials that I wished to see their masters and came from the Curé of St. Nizier's, they laughed in my face and threw bucketfuls of water on my feet . . . What could I do? it was my own fault; only corn-cutters go to call on

<sup>1</sup> Louis: an old French coin.—Tr.

people at that hour. I made a mental note of it.

"Knowing you as I do, I am sure that in my place you would never have dared to return to those houses and brave the derisive looks of the flunkeys. Well, I went back with perfect self-assurance, in the afternoon of the same day, and again asked the domestics to announce me to their masters, again as the gentleman who came from the Curé of St. Nizier's. I met two very different men who welcomed me differently. The Count of Rue de Lille received me coldly. His long and lean figure was solemn and serious and rather intimidated me; I could hardly think of anything to say to him. He also hardly spoke to me. He looked at the Curé's letter, put it in his pocket, asked me to leave my address and dismissed me with an icy gesture, saying:

" 'I shall see what I can do for you. You need not come again. If I find something, I shall write to you.'

"Confounded fellow! I left his house feeling chilled to the bone. Fortunately the reception extended to me in Rue Saint-Guillaume was such as to warm my heart. I found there the jolliest Duke in the world, the most easy-going, comfortable-sized, charming, beaming Duke. And how fond he was of his dear Curé of Saint-Nizier's! And how gladly he welcomed anybody who came from him! Oh, what a dear man! what a nice Duke! We made friends at once. He offered me a pinch of bergamot tobacco, he pulled my ear, and he

sent me away with a little slap on my cheek and with the encouraging words :

“ ‘ You can depend on me; in no time I shall find you a good job. From now on, come to see me as often as you like !’

“ I went away overjoyed.

“ I stayed away discreetly for two days. Only on the third day did I venture as far as Rue Saint-Guillaume. A big brute in blue and gold asked for my name. I answered importantly : ‘ Say that it is the person coming from the Curé of St. Nizier’s.’

“ He returned after an instant :

“ ‘ His Grace is very busy. He begs the gentleman to excuse him and to come some other day.’

“ Of course I excused him, that poor busy Duke !

“ Next day I returned at the same hour. I found yesterday’s big blue brute perched like a macaw on top of the perron. As soon as he caught sight of me he said gravely :

“ ‘ His Grace is out.’

“ ‘ Oh, very well,’ I answered, ‘ I shall come at some other time. Tell him please that the person coming from the Curé of St. Nizier’s had called.’ ”

“ Next day I went there again, and also on the following days, but always without success. Once the Duke was in his bath, another time at Mass, then again he was playing tennis, next day there were some people with him. People ! what an expression. As if I were not ‘ people ’ too !

"At last I felt so ridiculous with my eternal 'from the Curé of Saint-Nizier's' that I dared not say it any more. But the big blue macaw of the perron never allowed me to leave without calling out with imperturbable gravity:

"'Monsieur is doubtless the gentleman who comes from the Curé of Saint Nizier's?'

"And this seemed very funny to other blue macaws who were loafing about in the court-yards. That bunch of scoundrels! I wish I could have given them a good thrashing—coming from me, not from the Curé!

"I had been in Paris for about ten days; one evening I came home crestfallen from one of my visits to Rue Saint-Guillaume—I had sworn to keep on going there until I was positively driven away—to find a letter waiting for me at the doorkeeper's; guess from whom? A letter from the Count, my dear boy, from the Count of Rue de Lille, who invited me to present myself without delay to his friend, the Marquis d'Hacqueville; a secretary was wanted. Just think, what joy! and also what a good lesson! That cold and curt man, upon whom I counted so little, was the one who really took interest in me; while the other, who had been so engaging, made me dance attendance on his person for eight days, exposing me as well as the Curé of St. Nizier's, to the impertinent laughter of his blue and golden macaws . . . Such is life, my boy; and in Paris one learns quickly.

“Without losing a minute’s time I ran to the Marquis d’Hacqueville. I found a little old man, frisky, lean, all nerves, lively and gay like a bee. You will see what a pleasant type of man he is. He has a pale aristocratic face, stiff and straight hair, and only one eye—the other was put out by a sword thrust a long time ago. But the remaining eye is so bright, so lively, so expressive, so inquisitive, that you could not possibly call the Marquis one-eyed. He simply has two eyes in one.

“When I found myself in the presence of this strange little man, I started to say the commonplace nothings suitable for the occasion; but he interrupted me at once:

“‘No empty phrases!’ he said. ‘I don’t like them. Let us come to the point at once. I have undertaken to write my memoirs. Unfortunately I have started rather late and have no time to lose, as I am getting old. I have calculated that I need three more years to finish the book, if I make use of every moment. I am seventy years old, my legs are giving way, but the head has held out. So I can hope to carry on the three years and bring my memoirs to an end. But I have not a minute to lose; that is what my secretary has not understood. That idiot—a very intelligent boy, upon my word! I was delighted to have him—took it into his head that he was in love and wanted to marry. No harm, so far. But what happens this morning? Does not the fellow turn up and ask for two days’ leave for



his wedding? Oh, indeed? Two days' leave! Not a minute.

"“But, Monsieur le Marquis....”"

"“No, Monsieur le Marquis.... If you want to go away for two days, you can go away for good.”"

"“I am going, Monsieur le Marquis.”"

"“Good journey!”"

"“And off he goes, that scamp.... Now I am counting on you, my dear boy, to take his place. These are the conditions: the secretary comes to my house at eight o'clock in the morning; he brings his lunch with him. I dictate until midday. At midday the secretary takes his lunch alone, for I never have lunch. After the secretary's lunch, which has to be very short, we go back to work. If I go out, the secretary accompanies me; he carries paper and pencil. I dictate always: when I drive, when I walk, when I pay calls, everywhere. In the evening the secretary dines with me. After dinner we read through what I have dictated during the day. I go to bed at eight o'clock and the secretary is free until next day. I give him hundred francs a month and the dinner. It is not a fortune: but in three years' time, when the memoirs are finished, there will be a present, and a royal present, on the word of a d'Hacqueville! What I expect is punctuality, no marrying, and ability to write very quickly to dictation. Can you take down dictations?"

"“Oh, Monsieur le Marquis, very well

indeed.' I answered, feeling strongly tempted to laugh.

"Was it not comical indeed—Destiny's obstinate insistence on my taking down dictations throughout my life?

"'Good!' said the Marquis, 'sit down. There is paper and ink. We are going to work at once. I am at Chapter XXIV. "My quarrel with Monsieur de Villéle." Write . . .'

"And he began to dictate, in a thin little voice like a cicada's, hopping around the room.

"So my dear Daniel, I was engaged by this strange character, who is in reality an excellent man. So far we are very pleased with each other; last evening, on hearing of your arrival, he insisted that I should take away this bottle of old wine for you. A bottle of the same kind is served every night at dinner—to show you that we dine well . . . In the morning, of course, I bring my lunch with me: and you would laugh if you saw me eating my two-penny-worth of Italian cheese out of a beautiful plate from Moustier's, on an emblazoned tablecloth. The old boy does not do this out of avarice: but in order to spare his old cook, M. Pilois, the fatigue of preparing my lunch . . . On the whole I am not having an unpleasant time. The Marquis' memoirs are extremely instructive, I am learning a lot of things about M. Decazes and M. de Villéle, which cannot fail to be of use to me some day. At eight o'clock in the evening I am free. I go to read the papers in a public library or to say how-do-you-do to our friend Pierrotte . . . I say, do

you remember Pierrotte? Pierrotte from the Cévennes, Mummy's foster-brother? But Pierrotte has ceased to be Pierrotte: he is Monsieur Pierrotte, as stout as a barrel. He has a grand chinaware shop in the Passage du Saumon: and since he was very fond of Madame Eysette, he threw his door wide open to me. On winter evenings it was very advantageous . . . . But now that you are here I am not afraid of lonely evenings any more, . . . are you, my little brother? Oh Daniel, Daniel, I am so glad! How happy we are going to be!"

### III MY MOTHER JACK

JACK has concluded his Odyssey and now it is my turn. In vain the dying fire signals to us: "Go to sleep, my children!" The candles call out in vain: "To bed! to bed we are burnt down to our sockets!"—Jack says laughing: "We do not hear you."

And our vigil continues.

You see—the story I am telling my brother interests him intensely. I tell him about little Thingummy's life at Sarlande—the sad life that the reader no doubt remembers; the heartless, ugly pupils, the persecutions, the hatred, the humiliations, M. Viot's perpetually angry keys, the small stifling room under the roof, the betrayals, the tearful nights; and then—Jack is so good that you can tell him any-

thing—also about the debauchees at the Café Barbette, the absinthe with the corporals, the debts, the loss of self-respect—in short, about everything, down to the suicide and to Abbé Germane's terrible prediction: 'You will be a child all your life.'

Resting his elbows on the table, his head in his hands, Jack hears my confession to the end without interrupting. From time to time I can see him shudder and hear his murmur:

"Poor boy, poor boy."

When I have finished he rises, takes my hands in his and says in a gentle, trembling voice:

"Abbé Germane was right; Daniel, you are a child, a small child that is unable to walk alone through life, and you have done very well to seek refuge in me. From to-day on, you are not only my brother, you are also my son; and since our mother is far away, I shall take her place. What do you say, Daniel, would you like me to be your mother Jack? I shall not be too tiresome, you will see. All that I ask of you is that you let me always walk by your side and hold your hand. Then you will feel secure and be able to look life straight in the face, like a man, and it will not devour you."

Instead of replying I embraced him.

"Oh, bother Jack, you are so good!"

And I burst into bitter tears, unable to stop, exactly like the Jack of old times, the Jack of Lyons. To-day's Jack does not cry any more; the cistern is empty, as he says.

Whatever may happen, he will never cry again.

A clock strikes seven. The windowpanes are getting bright. A pale chilly light enters the room.

"Daylight is coming," says Jack, "time to go to sleep. Go quickly to bed . . . you need it, I dare say."

"And you, Jack?"

"I have not got two days' train journey on my back . . . Besides, I have to return some books to the library before going to the Marquis, and I have no time to lose. You know that d'Hacqueville can't be trifled with . . . I shall be back in the evening, at eight . . . . When you are quite rested, you can go out for a little walk. First of all I advise you . . ."

And mother Jack begins to give me a lot of very important advice useful for a newly arrived person. Unfortunately I have stretched myself out on the bed while he is talking, and although I am not exactly asleep, my thoughts are not quite clear any more. The fatigue, the pie, the tears . . . I am already half dozing. Vaguely I hear somebody talking of a restaurant which is quite close, of money in my waistcoat pocket, of bridges to be crossed, of boulevards to be passed, of policemen to be consulted, and of the belfry of St. Germain-des-Prés as a rallying point. In my half-slumber I am particularly impressed by this belfrey of Saint Germain. I see two, five, ten belfries of Saint Germain standing around my bed like signposts. Among these belfries somebody

moves about in the room, pokes the fire, draws the window curtains, then approaches and spreads an overcoat over my legs, kisses me on the forehead and goes quickly away, followed by the sound of a door being closed . . . .

I had been sleeping for some hours and I believe I should have slept until mother Jack's return, when the sound of a bell suddenly woke me. It was the Sarlande bell, the terrible iron bell: "Bim-bam! wake up! Bim-bam! dress yourself!" With a bound I was in the middle of the room, my mouth open, ready to cry "Come on boys!" Then I became aware of Jack's room and laughed aloud and started a crazy dance around the room. What I had taken for the bell of Sarlande was the bell of a neighbouring workshop, which rang sharply and savagely like the other one. But the College bell had a more wicked, more infernal tone. Luckily it was two hundred miles away and however loud it might ring, there was no danger of my hearing it.

I went to the window and opened it. I almost expected to see the Seniors' courtyard with its melancholic trees and the man of the keys gliding along the walls . . .

When I opened the window it was just twelve o'clock. The big tower of Saint Germain's was the first to ring out the twelve regular strokes of the "Angelus", almost in my ear. Through the open window the rich heavy notes crashed into Jack's room, three at a time, and falling, burst like sonorous bubbles, filling the room with sound. To St.

Germain's "Angelus" the other bells of Paris answered in manifold voices . . . Paris rumbled below, invisible . . . I stayed there for a moment, looking at the cupolas, the spires, the towers gleaming in the sun; then suddenly the noise of the city rose up to me and seized me with a wild desire to plunge, to throw myself into the noise, the crowd, into this life, these passions; drunkenly I said to myself: "I am going to see Paris!"

#### IV THE DISCUSSION OF THE BUDGET

MORE than one Parisian must have said when he went home that evening for his dinner: "What a queer little fellow I have met to-day!" As a matter of fact little Thingummy must have been quite a comical figure, with his too long hair, his too short trousers, his galoshes, his blue stockings, his provincial air and his solemn gait, peculiar to all who are too small.

It was a day late in winter—one of those tepid and luminous days which, in Paris, are more spring-like than spring itself. There were a great many people abroad. I walked timidly, along the walls, somewhat dazed by the noise and bustle of the streets. People jostled me, I said "Pardon!" and blushed a deep red. I also took good care not to stop in front of shops, and for nothing on earth should I have asked my way. I took one

street after another and always walked straight ahead. People were looking at me, to my great embarrassment. There were some who turned round on my heels, and smiling faces passed me. Once I heard a woman say to another: "Look at that one." It made me stumble...

Another thing made me very uneasy: the inquisitive eye of the policemen. At every street corner that infernal prying eye was calmly levelled at me; and when I had passed on I still could feel it following me from far, burning my back. At bottom I was a little anxious... I walked thus for nearly an hour, until I came to a large boulevard planted with slender trees. There was so much noise, so many people, so many carriages, that I stopped, almost frightened.

"How shall I get out of here?" I wondered. "How to return home? If I ask for the belfry of Saint Germain people will laugh at me. I shall look like a stray bell that has lost its way returning from Rome on Easter Day."

So, in order to give myself some time to reflect on the next step, I stopped in front of some theatre placards, with the busy air of a man who studies the bill of fare for his evening's entertainment. Unfortunately, the placards which were for the others very interesting, gave not the slightest information about the belfry of Saint Germain and I was running the risk of standing there until Doomsday, when suddenly mother Jack appeared at my side. He was as surprised as I.



"You, Daniel? What are you doing here? Good God!"

I answered quite carelessly:

"Can't you see? I am going for a walk."

The good fellow looked at me with admiration.

"He is already quite a Parisian!"

As a matter of fact I was very glad to find him there and clung to his arm with childish happiness—like I did in Lyons when M. Eysette had come to fetch us, on the steamer.

"How lucky that I have met you!" says Jack. "My Marquis is suffering from loss of voice, and as it is fortunately impossible to dictate by gestures, he has given me leave until to-morrow... So we shall be able to go for a long walk."

He takes me by the arm and we start forth through Paris, arm in arm, proud of walking together.

Now that my brother is with me, the streets do not frighten me any longer. I carry my head high, as cool and self-possessed as a Zouave trumpeter; and woe to the first man who will laugh! One thing however makes me uneasy; as we walk on, Jack repeatedly casts a piteous look at me. I dare not ask him why.

"You know, your galoshes are quite nice," he says after some time.

"Aren't they, Jack?"

"Yes, indeed, quite nice..."

Then he adds smiling:

"All the same, when I become rich I shall

buy you a pair of good shoes to wear inside them."

Poor Jack! he has spoken without malice; but it is enough to make me feel ill at ease. I am again seized with shame and confusion. I feel ridiculous wearing my galoshes on the wide boulevard streaming with bright sunshine, and no matter what compliments Jack may pay to my footwear, I want to go home at once.

At home we settle down by the fireplace and spend a jolly day chattering like two sparrows on a roof-gutter. Towards evening there is a knock at the door. A servant of the Marquis brings my trunk.

"Good!" says mother Jack, "we shall inspect your wardrobe."

Oh yes, my wardrobe...

The inspection begins. You ought to see our piteously comical faces as we make out the meagre inventory. Jack kneels down in front of the trunk and announces the articles as he produces them one by one.

"A dictionary, a cravat, another dictionary... what's that? a pipe... so you are smoking?... Another pipe... merciful God! what a lot of pipes... I wish you had as many socks... What is this big book? Oh... Register of Punishments.... Boucoyran 500 lines,... Soubeyrol 400 lines... Boucoyran 500 lines.... Boucoyran... Boucoyran.... My word! he didn't have a good time with you, this chap Boucoyran... All the same,

two or three dozen shirts would be far more useful...."

At this stage of the inventory, mother Jack cries out in surprise:

"Mercy! Daniel.. what do I see? Poems! there are poems here!.... So you are still writing poetry?... You sly fellow, why did you never tell me in your letters? You know, though, that I am not a layman... I too have written poetry in my time. Remember '*Religion, Religion! Poem in twelve Cantos?*' ... Come, my lyrical friend, let's have a look at your writings!"

"Oh no, Jack, please... It's not worth reading."

"All are alike, these poets," laughs Jack, "come, sit down here and read your poems to me, or else I shall read them myself—and you know how badly I recite."

This threat settles it; I begin to read.

I had written these verses at Sarlande, under the chestnut-trees of the Prairie while watching the schoolboys... Good verses or bad verses? I certainly do not remember; but how exciting it is to read them aloud! Just think of it: poems you have never shown to anyone! And then the author of *Religion! Religion!* is not an ordinary judge; if he should laugh at me?... As I proceed however, the music of the rhymes carries me away and my voice grows steady. Sitting in front of the window Jack listens impassively. Behind him a huge red sun sinks in the horizon and sets the windowpanes on fire. On the edge of the

roof a lean tomcat yawns and stretches himself, looking at us; he has the surly look of a member of the Comédie Française listening to a tragedy. . . . I see all this with one eye, without interrupting the recital.

Unhoped-for triumph! No sooner have I finished than Jack rises, enraptured, and embraces me.

"Oh Daniel! how beautiful, how beautiful!"

I look at him with some diffidence:

"Jack, do you really think so?"

"Wonderful, my boy, wonderful! . . . Fancy that you had these treasures in your trunk and did not breathe a word about it! Incredible!"

And mother Jack paces the room, gesticulating and muttering to himself. Suddenly he stops and assumes a solemn look:

"There is no room for doubt: Daniel, you are a poet, you must remain a poet and make that your career."

"Oh Jack, that will be very difficult. . . . Especially in the beginning. . . . One earns so little."

"Pshaw! I shall earn for two, no fear."

"And the home, Jack? The home we wanted to rebuild?"

"I shall see to it. I feel strong enough to rebuild it all by myself and you will make it famous—think how proud our parents will be to live in a renowned home!"

I attempt a few more objections; but Jack has an answer to everything. Besides, I must admit that I offer but feeble resistance. The

fraternal enthusiasm seizes me too. The Holy Faith Poetry is growing in me by leaps and bounds and I can already feel a *lamartinian pruritus*<sup>1</sup> pervade my whole being . . . There is however one point upon which Jack and I disagree entirely. Jack wants me to join the French Academy at the age of thirtyfive. I on the other hand refuse vigorously to do so. Confound the Academy! It's out of date, antiquated, as old as the Pyramids, a devil of an idea!

"One more reason why you should join it," says Jack, "you will infuse some young blood into the veins of that set of old fogeys. . . And Madame Eysette will be so pleased!"

What can I answer to this? Madame Eysette's name is an argument to which there is no reply. I shall have to resign myself to don the green gown. All right! let it be the Academy. If my colleagues bore me too much, I shall do like Merimée and never attend the meetings.

Night has fallen in the course of this discussion and Saint Germain's bells chime gaily, as though to celebrate Daniel Eysette's entry into the Academy.

"Let us go and dine!" says mother Jack.

And he leads me, very proud of being seen with an Academician, into a *Crémérie* in Rue Saint-Benoît.

It is cheap little restaurant, with a *table d'hôte* at the far end for the regular customers.

<sup>1</sup> Lit. "Lamartinian itch" after the famous French lyrical poet Lamartine—lyrical urge. (Translator's note).

We eat in the front room, among a crowd of very ill clad and famished people, who scrape their plates in silence.

"Nearly all of these are literary men," whispers Jack.

In my heart of hearts I cannot help a few melancholic reflections occurring to me at this sight; but I take good care not to communicate them to Jack, lest they chill his enthusiasm.

We have a very gay dinner. Monsieur Daniel Eysette, Member of the French Academy, displays great animation and an even greater appetite. When the meal is over we hurry back to our belfry; and while the Academician smokes his pipe astride the window-sill, Jack sits at the table, labouring at some difficult calculations, which seem to cause him great anguish. He gnaws his nails, shifts in his chair with feverish restlessness, counts on his fingers; then he suddenly rises with a triumphant cry:

"Hurrah! I have managed it."

"What have you managed, Jack?"

"I have managed to make our budget, my boy. Believe me, it was no easy job, with sixty francs a month to live on for two people!"

"Why sixty? . . . I thought you earned 100 francs!"

"Yes, but there are 40 francs to be sent each month to Madame Eysette, for the reconstruction of the home . . . which leaves us 60 francs. We pay 15 francs for the room; as you see it is not expensive, only I have to make the bed myself."

"I can do that too, Jack."

"No, no, that would not be proper for an Academician.... But let us return to the budget: so we have 15 francs for the room, 5 francs for coal—only five because I go to fetch it myself from the works every month,—that leaves 40 francs. For your food, let us say 30 francs. You will dine at the restaurant where we went to-night, 15 sous<sup>1</sup> without dessert, and you have seen that it is not bad. That leaves you 5 sous for your lunch. Is that enough?"

"I should think so!"

"We have 10 francs left. I put down 7 francs for the laundry.... What a pity that I have no time! I could go myself to the washerwoman's boat.... 3 francs are left, which I spend like this: 30 sous for my lunch—you know, I have every day a good meal with my Marquis, so I do not need as substantial a lunch as you. The last 30 sous are for small expenses, tobacco, stamps, and other unforeseen needs. That comes to exactly 60 francs. Well, is it a good estimate or is it not?"

And Jack starts skipping about the room; then he stops suddenly, looking dismayed.

"No.... the budget has to be done over again. I have forgotten something."

"What is that?"

"Candles! How will you work at night if you have no candle? It is an unavoidable expense, and an expense of at least 5 francs a

<sup>1</sup> Sou = 5 Centimes (Cents)—*Tr.*

month. . . . Where could I scrape that from, these 5 francs? . . . . The money for the home is sacred, and on no account shall I . . . . eh! I have got it! The month of March is approaching and with it spring, warm weather, sunshine."

"And so, Jack?"

"And so, Daniel! when the weather is warm, coal is unnecessary; that means we can transfer the 5 francs for coal toward the purchase of candles—and the problem is solved. I was decidedly born to become a Minister of Finance! . . . . What do you say? Now the budget holds good; I do not think we have forgotten anything. . . . There is still the problem of shoes and clothing, but I know what I am going to do. . . . My evenings are free from eight o'clock on; I shall look for a post as book-keeper at some small merchant's. Surely our friend Pierrotte could easily find me one."

"I say, Jack! are you as intimate as all that with friend Pierrotte? Do you go there often?"

"Yes, very often. In the evenings we have some music there."

"Indeed! Pierrotte is a musician?"

"No, his daughter is."

"His daughter! So he has a daughter? now, now, Jack. . . . Is she pretty, this Mademoiselle Pierrotte?"

"Oh, my boy, you are asking too many questions in one breath. I shall tell you some other day. It is late now, let's go to bed."



And in order to hide his embarrassment Jack starts busily to fold back the bedclothes, with the efficiency of an old maid.

There is a single iron bedstead, exactly like the one in which we slept together at Rue Lantern in Lyons.

"Do you remember, Jack—our bed in Lyons, how we used to read novels in secret. and M. Eysette would shout from his bed, in his fiercest voice: 'Put out that light, or else I shall get up!'"

Jack remembers it and many other things too... One memory follows the other, and when Saint Germain's strikes midnight, we have not yet thought of sleep.

"Enough!" says Jack resolutely, "Good night!"

But after five minutes I hear him giggling under his blanket.

"What are you laughing at, Jack?"

"At Abbé Micou, you know, Abbé Micou of the choir school... do you remember him?"

"Sure!"

And we visit it again, laughing, laughing and prattling, and so on... This time I am the reasonable one who says:

"We must go to sleep."

But an instant later I start again, wider awake than ever:

"And Rouget, Jack, do you remember Rouget?"

Fresh bursts of laughter and endless talk. Suddenly a heavy blow shakes the parti-

tion wall by the bed. We are both startled into silence.

"It's White-Cuckoo" Jack whispers into my ear.

"White-Cuckoo! what is that?"

"Pst! not so loud.... White-Cuckoo is our neighbour, she is probably complaining because we are keeping her awake."

"I say, Jack!-what a funny name she has, this neighbour of ours.... White-Cuckoo.... is she young?"

"You will be able to see for yourself, my boy. Sooner or later you will meet her on the stairs.... And now let us go to sleep quickly or else White-Cuckoo might become angry again."

Jack blows out the candle and Monsieur Daniel Eysette (Member of the French Academy) falls asleep on his brother's shoulder, as he used to when he was ten years old.

## *V WHITE-CUCKOO AND THE LADY OF THE FIRST FLOOR*

In the square of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, close by the church there is a small window in a corner right under the roofs; whenever I look at it I feel something gripping my heart. It is the window of our old room; and even to-day I fancy, whenever I walk past, that the Daniel of old is sitting up there at his table by the

window and smiles pityingly as he looks down into the street at the Daniel of to-day, a sad and already stooping figure.

Ah! old clock of Saint-Germain's, how many lovely hours did you strike for me when I lived up there with mother Jack! . . . . Could you not strike more such hours again, hours of courage and youth? I was so happy in those days! I worked with so much pleasure and zeal!

In the morning we were up at daybreak. Jack immediately applied himself to the household tasks. He fetched water, swept the floor, put my table in order. I was not allowed to touch anything. If I asked him :

"Jack, do you want me to help you?"

He would laugh :

"Certainly not, Daniel. Think of the lady of the first floor!"

With these words, so full of meaning, he effectively closed my lips.

This is the explanation :

In the first days of our common household I had the task of fetching water from the courtyard. At any other hour of the day I should perhaps not have had the courage to do it, but in the morning the house was still asleep and my vanity did not run the risk of being met on the staircase carrying a pitcher. I used to go downstairs half dressed, as soon as I had got up. Sometimes a groom in a red coat would be cleaning harnesses near the water pump. He was the coachman of the lady who lived on the first floor, a very elegant

young Creole woman, about whom there was much talk in the house. The presence of this man was sufficient to make me uneasy; if he was there I felt ashamed, I pumped quickly and went upstairs with my pitcher only half full.

Once back in my roof I found that I had been very ridiculous; which did not prevent me from being as much embarrassed next day, if I again espied the red coat in the courtyard. . . . Well, one morning I had been lucky enough to elude the formidable red coat and was gaily climbing the stairs with a full pitcher, when I found myself on the first floor face to face with a lady who was descending. It was the Lady of the First Floor. She walked proud and erect, with her eyes lowered on a book, moving slowly in a cloud of billowy silks. At first sight I thought her beautiful, although rather pale; the thing which left me the clearest impression was a small white scar just below her lip. When the lady passed me, she looked up. I was standing near the wall, holding my pitcher, very red and very ashamed. Think of it! to be caught like this, looking like a water carrier, ill-kempt, wet, collarless, with half-open shirt—what a humiliation! I wished I could vanish into the wall. . . . For a second the lady looked straight at my face, smiling slightly with the air of an indulgent queen; then she passed on. . . .

When I came in I was furious. I told Jack of my adventure and he laughed at my vanity; but the next morning he took the

pitcher without saying a word and went downstairs. Since then he went down every morning and I let him do it, in spite of the remorse I felt; I was too afraid of meeting the lady of the first floor.

When the housework was done Jack went off to his Marquis and I did not see him until evening. I passed my days face to face with the Muse, or what I called the Muse. From morning till night my table stood by the open window; and I sat at this work-bench and strung rhymes. From time to time a sparrow would come to drink in the gutter on the roof and stop to look impudently at me, then he would go away to tell the others what I was doing there, and I could hear the patter of their little feet on the slates. . . . There were also the bells of St. Germain who visited me several times a day. I loved these visits. They came in noisily through the window and filled the room with music. Sometimes a playful chime came in, chasing gay double peals; sometimes a dark, sorrowful knell, with its notes falling one by one like tears. Then I had the "Angelus": the "Angelus" of mid-day—an Archangel in glittering raiment of sunshine, who entered my room resplendent with light; the evening "Angelus"—a melancholy Seraph, who descended on a moonbeam and filled the whole room with moisture as he shook his great wings. . . .

The Muse, the sparrows, the bells—these were my only visitors. Who else would have come to see me? Nobody knew me. At the

*Crémérie* in Rue Saint-Benoit I always took care to seat myself at a small table apart from everybody else; I ate quickly, with my eyes fixed upon my plate; then I would take my hat furtively and go home as fast as my legs could carry me. There were no diversions, no outings, not even to the music in the Luxembourg gardens. The morbid shyness which I had inherited from Madame Eysette was increased by the shabbiness of my dress and by the wretched galoshes that we had not yet been able to replace. The street frightened me and made me feel ashamed.

I should have liked never to have to descend from my belfry. Yet sometimes on those gay wet parisian spring evenings I would meet on my return from the restaurant, flocks of students in high spirits; and when I saw them walking arm in arm, with their big hats, their pipes, their sweethearts, all kinds of thoughts would pass through my head.... Then I would quickly climb to my fifth floor, light my candle and start to work furiously until Jack's return.

When Jack came home the room looked changed. It was full of cheerfulness, of noise, of movement. There was singing and laughter, there were many questions about the news of the day.

"Have you worked well?" Jack would ask me, "does your poem make progress?"

Then he would report some new invention of his eccentric Marquis, and take out from his pocket some dainties from the dessert put

aside for me and watch me devour them, greatly entertained. After this I would return to my poetical work bench. Jack would take two or three turns round the room, and when he thought I was set going, he would slip away, saying :

"Since you are working, I'll go and look in *there*."

"There" meant at the Pierrottes; and if you have not yet guessed why Jack went so often *there*, you can't be very shrewd. I for one had understood everything from the first day—just by the way he smoothed his hair in front of the mirror before going out, and did and undid the bow of his tie three or four times. But I did not want to embarrass him; so I pretended to be quite without suspicions and only laughed quietly to myself, thinking many things. . . .

When Jack had gone I settled down to my rhymes. There was not the slightest noise at that hours; the sparrows, the "Angelus", all my friends were asleep. A perfect tête-à-tête with the Muse. . . . Towards nine o'clock I heard steps on the stairs—the small wooden staircase which was a continuation of the main stairs. Miss White-Cuckoo, our neighbour, was coming home. From that moment on I could not work. Impudently my brain migrated to the neighbouring room and would not budge from there. . . . Who could she be, this mysterious White-Cuckoo? Impossible to get the least information on this subject :

If I enquired of Jack, he would reply with a sly look :

“ What ! you have not yet met our wonderful neighbour ? ”

But he never gave any further explanations. I thought : “ He does not want me to meet her—she is no doubt a grisette, a little lady of the Quartier Latin. . . . ” And this idea set my head aglow. I imagined a fresh, young, gay thing—a grisette, in short ! Even the name White-Cuckoo had, I thought, a piquant flavour : one of those pretty love nicknames—like Mimi Pinson or Musette. She was however a very virtuous, very well-behaved Musette who came home at the same hour every night, and always alone. I knew that, through having applied my ear to the partition several times, at the hour of her coming. . . . Invariably I heard this : first, something like the sound of a bottle being repeatedly uncorked and corked up again ; then after a short moment : “ puff ! ” a heavy body falling on the floor ; and almost at once a thin, very shrill little voice, the voice of a sick cricket, intoning a strange air on three notes, as sad as anything. There were words to this tune, but I could not make them out, except for some incomprehensible syllables which sounded like “ Tolocototinaw ! tolocototinaw ! ” and recurred from time to time in the song, like a refrain. This strange music lasted for about an hour ; then with a last Tolocototinaw ! the voice suddenly stopped ; and I heard nothing



but slow and heavy breathing. . . . It was all very puzzling.

One morning mother Jack, who had gone to fetch water, entered hurriedly with an air of profound mystery and whispered:

"Pst! If you want to see our neighbour . . . she is there."

I made a dash for the landing. Jack had not lied: White-Cuckoo was in her room, the door wide open, and at last I could gaze upon her. . . . Oh God! it was like an apparition, and what an apparition! Imagine a small, entirely bare attic, a straw mattress on the floor, a bottle of brandy on the mantelpiece, and over the straw mattress a huge mysterious horse-shoe hung on the wall like a holy-water basin. Now imagine in the middle of this kennel a horrible negress with big mother-of-pearl eyes, short, woolly, curly hair like the fleece of a black lamb, and for dress only a faded bodice and an old red crinoline, with nothing on top.

It was thus that my neighbour White-Cuckoo appeared to me for the first time, the White-Cuckoo of my dreams, the sister of Mimi-Pinson and Bernerette. . . . O realms of romance, may this serve as a lesson to you!

"Well," said Jack, as I re-entered the room, "well, how did you like". He could not finish the sentence and burst into a fit of laughter at the sight of my dumbfounded mien. I had the good sense to do the same also and we stood laughing, face to face, unable to say a word. At that moment a big black

head popped through the half-open door and disappeared immediately, crying:

"Whites' laughing negro, not nice."

You can imagine that we laughed worse than before.

When we had calmed down a little, Jack informed me that the negress was in the service of the lady of the first floor; the other tenants accused her of being something of a witch, as proved by the horse-shoe, symbol of the Voodoo cult, hanging over her straw mattress. It was also rumoured that every night after her mistress had gone out, White-Cuckoo shut herself in her attic, got drunk on brandy until she collapsed and sang negro songs for a good part of the night. This explained the mysterious sounds which came from the neighbouring room—the uncorking of the bottle, the bump on the floor, and the monotonous air on three notes. As to the "tolocototinaw," it would seem that it is a kind of onomatopoeia widely used among the negroes of the Cape, something like our "tra-la-la"; the ebony-black man-in-the-street puts it in all his songs.

Needless to mention that the vicinity of White-Cuckoo failed to give me any thrill after that day. When she came upstairs in the evening my heart no longer quickened nor did I stir myself to go and glue my ear to the partition. . . . Sometimes, though, in the quiet of the night, the "tolocototinaws" reached up to my table, and I felt some vague uneasiness

hearing that sad refrain; as if I had a foreboding of the part it was to play in my life. . . .

Meanwhile Jack had found employment as a book-keeper on fifty francs a month at a small ironmonger's where he went every evening after leaving the Marquis. The poor boy imparted this news to me half pleased, half angry.

"How will you manage to go *there*?" I asked at once.

He answered, with his eyes full of tears :

"There is Sunday. . . ."

What was then that alluring "there" like, to which my mother Jack was so attached? I should very much have liked to know it. Unfortunately no offer came to take me there: and I was too proud to ask for it. Besides, how could I go anywhere in my galoshes?

One Sunday however, as Jack was about to go to Pierrotte's he said with some embarrassment :

"Would you not like to accompany me *there*, young Daniel? They would be certainly very pleased."

"My dear fellow, you are joking."

"Yes, I know. . . . Pierrotte's drawing room is not the right place for a poet . . . they are just a lot of old bores."

"Oh, it's not that, Jack; I mean only because of my clothes. . . ."

"That's right. . . . I did not think of it," said Jack.

And he went off as though delighted to have a genuine reason for not taking me *there*.

Hardly arrived at the foot of the stairs, he climbs up again and comes in quite out of breath.

"Daniel," he asks, "if you had shoes and a presentable jacket, would you have accompanied me to Pierrotte's house?"

"Why not?"

"All right! come on, then. . . . I am going to buy you everything you need, and we shall go *there*."

I looked at him in amazement.

"This is the end of the month so I have money," he added, so as to convince me.

I was so pleased at the idea of having new togs that I did not notice Jack's emotion, nor the queer tone in which he spoke. Only later did I think of all this. For the moment I only gave him a hug, and we went to the Pierrottes, via the Palais-Royal, where I bought a new outfit from a dealer in old clothes.

## VI THE ROMANTIC STORY OF PIERROTTE

If anybody had told Pierrotte when he was twenty years of age, that he would become M. Lalouette's successor in the chinaware business, and the possessor of two hundred thousand francs deposited with his notary—Pierrotte's notary!—and a magnificent shop at

the corner of the Passage du Saumon,<sup>1</sup> he would have been truly amazed.

Even at twenty, Pierrotte had never left his village, wore heavy sabots of Cévennes fir-wood, did not know a word of French, and earned hundred crowns a year raising silk-worms; a stout fellow for the rest, a fine performer at country dances, fond of laughter, of singing and bragging, but always within the limits of honesty and without cheating the tavern-keepers. Like all lads of his age Pierrotte had a sweetheart, for whom he waited after Sunday Vespers at the church door, and took her to dance gavottes under the mulberry tree. Pierrotte's sweetheart was called Roberta, big Roberta. She was a pretty girl of eighteen, an orphan like him, poor like him, but she knew well how to read and write—which is even rarer in the Cévennes villages than a dowry. Pierrotte was very proud of his Roberta and intended to marry her as soon as he had drawn lots; but when the day came the poor fellow drew Number Four,—although he had dipped his hand three times in holy-water before going to the urn.... He had to go. Great was the despair!... Fortunately Madame Eysette, who had been practically brought up by Pierrotte's mother, her wet-nurse, came to her foster-brother's aid and lent him two thousand francs to pay for a substitute. There was money in the Eysette family at that time!—So the happy Pierrotte

<sup>1</sup> Passage du saumon = Saumon Lane.

did not have to leave and could marry his Roberta; but the good people wished first of all to repay the money to Madame Eysette, and as they could never have managed to do so while staying in their village, they had the courage to leave their native country and moved to Paris in search of good fortune.

For a year nothing was heard of our mountaineers; then one beautiful morning Madame Eysette received a touching letter, signed "Pierrotte and his wife", which contained three hundred francs, first fruit of their savings. The second year, another letter from "Pierrotte and his wife" with an enclosure of five hundred francs. In the third year, nothing.—In the fourth year a third letter from "Pierrotte and his wife", with the last instalment of twelve hundred francs and blessings for the whole Eysette family. Unfortunately when this letter arrived we were in the midst of disaster—the factory had been sold and we were about to go into exile. Absorbed in her grief, Madame Eysette forgot to reply to "Pierrotte and his wife". Since then we had no news from them, until the day when Jack arrived in Paris and found good old Pierrotte—Pierrotte without his wife, alas!—installed behind the counter of the former Lalouette establishment.

Nothing could be less poetical, nothing more touching, than the story of Pierrotte's fortunes. On their arrival in Paris Pierrotte's wife had courageously set about looking for work as a charwoman. The first house was

the Lalouette establishment. The Lalouettes were rich merchants, but miserly and eccentric and had never wanted to engage either a clerk or a maid, because you have to do everything yourself—"Sir, until the age of fifty I had made my pants myself!" Papa Lalouette said with pride—and who only in their old age indulged in the obvious luxury of a charwoman on a monthly salary of twelve francs. God knows that the work was well worth those twelve francs! The shop, the back-shop, a flat on the fourth story, two tubs of water to be filled in the kitchen every morning! you had to come from the Cévennes to accept such conditions; but never mind! the village lass was young and quick, inured to hard work, and as strong as a heifer. She performed her heavy duties in the twinkling of an eye and also showed all the time her pretty smile to the two old people into the bargain—which was in itself worth more than twelve francs. . .

In the end the brave girl's good temper and courage won the hearts of her employers. They took an interest in her and inquired about her; then one day—it happens sometimes that the most barren hearts have a sudden blossoming of kindness—old Lalouette spontaneously offered to lend Pierrotte a little money, so that he might be able to start some business of his own.

Pierrotte's idea was this: he procured an old mare and a cart and moved about from one end of Paris to the other, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Get rid of everything that's in your way!"

Our cunning friend did not sell: he bought.... What? everything: broken pots, old iron, waste paper, bottle fragments, discarded pieces of furniture too worthless to be sold, old grocery boxes which had become useless to the merchants, anything that has no value and that you keep in your house out of habit, out of carelessness, because you don't know what to do with it, anything that's in your way!.... Pierrotte did not turn up his nose at anything, he bought, or at least he accepted everything, for most of the things people did not sell, they gave them away to get rid of the rubbish. Get rid of everything that's in your way!

He was very popular in the Montmartre district. Like all small itinerant merchants who want to make themselves heard in the hubbub of the streets, he had adopted a peculiar chant, which the housewives knew well. First issued the tremendous full-throated cry:

"Get rid of everything that's in your waaaay!"

Then followed, in a slow and wailing tone, a long discourse addressed to the mare his Anastagilla, as he called her. He meant to say Anastasia.

"Come Anastagilla, let us go, come my child...."

And the good Anastagilla hung her head and followed him, ambling along the sidewalk



with a melancholy air; and from each house people called: "Pst! Pst! Anastagilla!"

The cart filled up as quickly as anything. When it was well loaded Anastagilla and Pierrotte went to Montmartre to unload the cargo at the place of a wholesale dealer in old rags, who paid good money for all that "get-rid-of-everything-that's-in-your-way"-rubbish, which they had got for nothing or almost nothing.

Pierrotte did not make a fortune in this strange profession, but he earned his living and earned it amply. After only one year the Lalouettes' money was repaid, and three hundred francs were sent to Mademoiselle,—it was thus that Pierrotte addressed Madame Eysette since she was a young girl, and he had never brought himself to call her by any other name. The third year, however, was not a lucky one. It was the year 1830. In vain Pierrotte cried: "Get rid of everything that's in your way!"—the Parisians were deaf to his cries. They were busy getting rid of an old king who was in their way and let the mountaineer bawl himself hoarse in the street; and evening after evening the little cart went home empty. To crown his ill luck, Anastagilla died. It was then that the Lalouettes, who were beginning to feel that they could not do everything by themselves, offered to engage Pierrotte as a shop-boy. Pierrotte accepted, but he did not stick to that modest office long. Since their arrival in Paris, his wife had been giving him reading and writing lessons every

night and now he was able to compose a letter and express himself in French in an intelligible manner. When he was engaged by Lalouette, he redoubled his efforts, went to a class for adults to learn arithmetic; and he worked so well that after a few months he was able to take the place of old Lalouette, now almost blind, at the counter, and that of Madame Lalouette at the sales, since her old legs would no more obey her strong will. A short time afterwards Mademoiselle Pierrotte was born, and from that moment Pierrotte's fortunes went on growing. First he acquired a share in the Lalouette business and later became their partner; then a day came when old Lalouette, having completely lost his eyesight, retired from business and made over his stocks to Pierrotte, who would pay him in annual instalments. Once on his own, he enlarged the business to such an extent that after three years he had paid off the Lalouettes and found himself free from liabilities and also in possession of a beautiful shop with eminently desirable circle of customers. Just then—as if she had waited for the time when her man would not need her any more—big Roberta fell ill, and died of exhaustion.

This is the story of Pierrotte, as Jack narrated it to me that night, while we were walking towards the Passage du Saumon; and since the way was long, for we had taken the longest route, so as to show off my new jacket to the Parisians—I knew all about our friend before I had set foot in his house. I knew

that our good Pierrotte had two idols who were above criticism: his daughter and M. Lalouette. I knew also that he was somewhat talkative and tiring to listen to, because he spoke slowly, fumbled for expressions, stammered, and was unable to say three words in succession without adding: "I may well say so: . . ." There was a good reason for this: Pierrotte was from the Cévennes and had never got accustomed to our language. He thought in Languedoc dialect and had to translate them into French; the I-may-well-say-so's with which he studded his conversation gave him time to carry out this little mental process: as Jack said, Pierrotte did not talk, he translated. . . . As to Mademoiselle Pierrotte, all I could learn about her was that she was sixteen years of age and that her name was Camille, nothing else. On this subject Jack was as dumb as a sturgeon.

It was about nine o'clock when we entered the late Lalouette's establishment. The shop was about to be closed. The door stood ajar and on the sidewalk in front of it lay a heap of bolts, iron bars, shutters, fastening apparatuses of imposing dimensions. The gas was turned off and the whole shop was in darkness except for the counter, upon which a large porcelaine lamp illuminated a pile of coins and a stout red face with a broad smile. In the background, behind the shop, somebody was playing a flute.

"Good evening, Pierrotte!" called Jack, standing in front of the counter. (I was beside

him, in the full light of the lamp.) "Good evening, Pierrotte!"

Pierrotte, who was checking up the cash, lifted his eyes on hearing Jack's voice; then he saw me, uttered a cry, folded his hands, and remained thus, looking at me open-mouthed and stupid.

"Well!" said Jack with a triumphant air, "what did I tell you?"

"Oh my God, my God!" muttered the good man, "I feel that.... I may well say so.... it seems to me that I am looking at her!"

"Especially the eyes," pursued Jack, "look at the eyes, Pierrotte."

"And the chin, Master Jack, the chin with the dimple", answered Pierrotte, who raised the lamp-shade so as to see me better.

I had no idea what they were talking about. Both of them were staring at me, winking and signalling to each other.... Suddenly Pierrotte rose, left the counter and came towards me with open arms:

"With your permission, Master Daniel, I must embrace you. . . . I may well say so. It is as if I was going to embrace Mademoiselle."

That last word explained everything. At that age I resembled Madame Eysette very much, and to Pierrotte, who had not seen Mademoiselle for some twentyfive years, the likeness must have been even more striking. The good man did not grow weary of clasping my hands, of embracing me, of gazing at me and laughing with his big eyes full of, tears;

then he began to talk to us of our mother, of the two thousand francs, of his Roberta, his Camille, his Anastagilla, and that' at such length and in so involved a manner that we might still be standing in his shop listening to his—"I may well say so"—if Jack had not impatiently interposed.

"And what about your cash account, Pierrotte?"

Pierrotte stopped short. He was slightly abashed for having talked so much.

"You are right, Master Jack, I am talking and talking... and then the little girl... I may well say so... the little girl will scold me for having come so late."

"Is Camille upstairs?" asked Jack, looking very indifferent.

"Yes, Master Jack, the little girl is upstairs... She is yearning... I may well say so... she is positively yearning to meet M. Daniel. Go up to... her. I shall finish my accounts and join you at once... I may well say so."

Without waiting to hear more Jack took my arm and quickly dragged me towards the back-shop, whence came the sound of the flute.

Pierrott's shop was large and well stocked. In the shadows around us glimmered round bellied decanters, opal glass shades, the tawny gold of Bohemian glass, large crystal cups, plump soup-tureens, and to our right and left were piles of plates reaching up to the ceiling—the place of the fairy, Porcelaine, seen by night.—The back-shop was still dimly lit by a

half-turned-on gas burner, we crossed the room. There was a tall fair young man sitting on the edge of a sofa-bed, who sadly played the flute. In passing, Jack bade him a very curt "Good evening", to which the fair young man answered with two equally curt notes on the flute, this being probably the form of greeting in use among flutes who dislike each other.

"He is the clerk," Jack told me on the staircase. "He bores us to death with his flute, that big blond idiot... Do you like the flute, Daniel?"

"I was tempted to ask: 'And the little girl, does she like it?' But I was afraid of hurting him and answered very gravely:

"No, Jack, I do not like the flute."

Pierrotte's flat was on the fourth floor of the same house. Mademoiselle Camille was too aristocratic to show herself in the shop and stayed upstairs, meeting her father only at meals.

"Oh, you will see," Jack said while we were ascending the stairs, "they live in quite grand style. Camille has a lady's companion, the widowed Madame Tribou, who is always with her... I don't know much about this Madame Tribou, but Pierrotte knows her and maintains that she is a lady of great merit... Ring, Daniel, it's here!"

I rang the bell; a girl from the Cévennes with a big head-dress, came to open the door, smiled at Jack as at an old acquaintance, and ushered us into the drawing room.

When we entered Mademoiselle Pierrotte was seated at the piano. Two rather stout old ladies, Madame Lalouette and the widow Tribou, the lady of great merit, were playing cards in a corner. Everybody rose to greet us. There was a moment of confusion and hubbub; then, as soon as introductions were over, Jack invited Camille—he called her Camille,—to return to the piano, and the lady of great merit took advantage of this to continue her game with Madame Lalouette. Jack and I had sat down on both sides of Mademoiselle Pierrotte, who was running her little fingers over the keys and talking and laughing with us at the same time. I looked at her while she talked. She was not pretty. A rosy white complexion, small ears, silky hair, but too plump cheeks, too much health, and red hands and the ‘sang froid’ of a school girl on vacation. She was very much Pierrotte’s daughter, a mountain flower grown in a glass case in the Passage du Saumon . . . Such was at least my first impression; but then—in answer to some word I had said to her—Mademoiselle Pierrotte, whose eyes had been lowered so far, slowly lifted them to me and the little bourgeoisie vanished as if by magic. I saw nothing but her eyes, two large, dazzling, dark eyes that I recognized at once.

O miracle! they were the same dark eyes that had shone on me with so soft a light, far away, between the cold walls of the old College, the dark eyes by the side of the spectacled witch, those dark eyes themselves.

I thought I was dreaming. I should have liked to call out to them: "Beautiful Dark Eyes, is it you? Is it you that I meet again in another face?" And if you knew how truly they were the same! It was impossible to be mistaken. The same lashes, the same radiance, the same dark, repressed fire. What madness to think that there could be two pairs of such eyes in the world! Besides, as a proof that they were really those dark eyes themselves, and no other merely resembling them, they too had recognized me and we were no doubt going to resume one of our pretty mute dialogues as of old when I heard, quite close by, almost in my ear, a sound like that of a mouse nibbling. At this sound I looked round and saw an individual sitting in an easy-chair at the corner of the piano, to whom I had so far paid no attention. It was a tall old man, lean and pale, with a bird's head, a receding forehead, pointed nose, round lifeless eyes which were too distant from the nose, almost on the temples . . . Without the piece of sugar the old fellow was holding and at which he pecked from time to time, one might have thought him asleep. Slightly disturbed by this apparition, I greeted the old phantom with a deep bow, which he did not acknowledge.

"He does not see you," said Jack, "he is blind . . . it's old father Lalouette!"

"The name suits him", I thought. And so as not to see the frightful old bird's head, I



turned swiftly towards the dark eyes; but alas! the spell was broken, the dark eyes had disappeared. There was in their place only a little bourgeoisie sitting bolt upright on her music stool.

Just then the drawing room door opened and Pierrotte came noisily in. The flute player entered behind him, with the flute under his arm. Jack shot a crushing glance at him, which would have knocked out a bull; but he must have missed his aim, for the flute-player did not flinch.

"Well, my little girl," said Pierrotte, heartily kissing his daughter "are you pleased? so they have brought you your Daniel . . . How do you find him? He is nice, isn't he? I may well say so . . . He is quite the picture of Mademoiselle."

And then the good Pierrotte, started again with the scene enacted in the shop; he dragged me into the middle of the drawing room so that everybody may see Mademoiselle's eyes, Mademoiselle's nose, Mademoiselle's dimpled chin . . . . This exhibition embarrassed me greatly. Madame Lalouette and the lady of great merit had stopped their game; lying back in their easy-chairs they examined me with cold interest, criticizing or praising aloud this or that piece of my person, quite as if I had been a small grain-fed chicken on sale at the Vallée market. Between ourselves: the lady of great merit appeared to be rather an expert on young birds.

Fortunately Jack put an end to my

torment by asking Mademoiselle Pierrotte to play something for us.

"That's right, let us play something," said the flute-player, eagerly darting forward, with the flute already in position.

Jack exclaimed :

"No, no . . . no duet, no flute ! "

At which the flute-player let fly at him a pale blue look as poisonous as a Caribbean arrow; but the other did not wince and continued to cry :

"No flute ! "

In the end Jack won and Mademoiselle Pierrotte played, without the accompaniment of flute; one of those well-known tremolos called "Rosellen Reveries" . . . . While she played Pierrotte wept for admiration, Jack swam in ecstasy; the flutist silently held the flute to his lips, beating time with his shoulders, and played inwardly.

The Rosellen having come to an end, Mademoiselle Pierrotte turned to me :

"And you, Monsieur Daniel," she said, lowering her lids; "shall we not hear you? . . . You are a poet, I know."

"And a good poet too," from Jack,—that indiscreet Jack.

As for me, you can imagine that I was not at all tempted to recite poetry to that tribe of Amalek. If at least those dark eyes had been present; but they were not, they had vanished an hour ago and in vain did I look for them everywhere . . . So my manner was

indeed very self-possessed as I replied to the young lady :

"Excuse me to-night, Mademoiselle; I have not brought my lyre."

"Don't forget to bring it next time," begged the good Pierrotte, who took my metaphor literally.

The poor man believed sincerely that I had a lyre and played upon it, like his shop assistant who played the flute... Jack had been right in warning me that he was introducing me into a queer kind of society!

Towards eleven o'clock tea was served. Mademoiselle Pierrotte went about the drawing room offering sugar, pouring out milk, her little finger held high. It was at this moment that I saw the dark eyes again. They appeared to me all of a sudden, luminous and sympathetic, and disappeared again before I had had time to speak to them... Then only I understood that there were in Mlle Pierrotte two very different beings : first, Mademoiselle Pierrotte, a plain middle class girl with flat tresses, well fitted to play the queen of the Pierrotte (formerly Lalouette) establishment; and then Dark Eyes, with large poetical eyes which opened like two flowers of velvet, to transfigure their burlesque surroundings. There was nothing about Mlle Pierrotte to attract me; but the dark eyes... Oh! the dark eyes!...

At last it was time to leave. It was Madame Lalouette who gave the signal. She rolled up her husband in a large plaid and

carried him away under her arm, like an ancient mummy in its wrappings. When they had gone Pierrotte detained us for a long time on the landing, holding interminable speech :

"Look here, M. Daniel, now that you are acquainted with my house, I hope you will visit it often. We have never much company, but it is a select company . . . I may well say so . . . First of all there are Monsieur and Madame Lalouette, my former employers; then Madame Tribou, a lady of the greatest merit, with whom you will be able to have nice talks; then my clerk, a good young man, he sometimes plays the flute for us . . . I may well say so . . . You will play duets together. That will be very nice."

I protested mildly, saying that I was very busy and should perhaps not be able to come as often as I wished.

He laughed at this :

"Come on, M. Daniel, you are busy? . . . I know you young men of the Quartier Latin! I may well say so . . . there must be some little lady, eh?

"As a matter of fact," said Jack, also laughing, "Miss White-Cuckoo is rather attractive . . ."

On hearing this name Pierrotte's merri-ment broke all bounds.

"What did you say, Master Jack? . . . White-Cuckoo? Her name is White-Cuckoo! Ha, ha, ha! what a boy! at his age . . ."

He stopped short, becoming aware of his

daughter who was listening; but we had reached the foot of the stairs when we could still hear him roaring with laughter, so that the staircase shook . . . .

"Well, how did you like them?" asked Jack as soon as we were in the street.

"My dear fellow, M. Lalouette is certainly ugly, but Mademoiselle Pierrotte is charming."

"Is she not?" exclaimed the poor lover with so much eagerness that I could not help grinning.

"Good! Jack, you have betrayed yourself," I told him, taking him by the hand.

We walked for a long time along the quays that night. At our feet thousands of tiny stars floated like pearls on the calm dark river. The moorings of large boats were creaking. - It was pleasant to stroll through the darkness and listen to Jack talking of love . . . He loved with his whole heart; but she did not care for him, he knew, for certain that she did not care for him.

"Then no doubt she cares for someone else, Jack."

"No, Daniel, I do not think that she has loved anyone until to-night."

"Until to-night! Jack, what do you mean?"

"Oh, everybody is fond of you, Daniel . . . she might well become fond of you too."

Poor, dear Jack! He spoke so sadly, with so much resignation . . . I began to laugh loudly, in order to reassure him; even more loudly than I wanted to.

"I say, my boy! you are going fast . . . Am I so irresistible or is Mademoiselle Pierrotte so inflammable? No, mother Jack, set your mind at rest. Mademoiselle Pierrotte is as far removed from my heart as I am from hers: I assure you that you have nothing to fear from me."

What I said was the truth. Mademoiselle Pierrotte did not exist for me. The dark eyes, of course—they did.

## VII THE RED ROSE AND THE DARK EYES

AFTER this first visit to the former Lalouette establishment I did not go "there" for some time. Jack on the other hand faithfully continued his Sunday pilgrimages and each time he invented a new and alluring bow for his necktie. Jack's tie was as good as a poem, an ardent but restrained love poem—something like an Eastern "Sélam," one of those emblematic nosegays that the Turks offer to their sweethearts and which they know how to make so as to express all degrees and shades of passion.

Had I been a woman, Jack's bow with its infinite variations would have moved me more than any declaration. But—need I tell you?—women do not understand these things . . .

Every Sunday before going out the poor fellow would inevitably say :

"I am going 'there', Daniel... Are you coming?"

And I would invariably answer :

"No, Jack, I am working."

Then he would go away, very quickly, and I would remain alone, bent over the poetical work-bench.

I was resolved, very firmly resolved, not to revisit Pierrotte's. I was afraid of those dark eyes. I said to myself : "If you see them again you are lost," and I held out, I would not see them again... You see, I could not get them out of my head, those bewitching eyes. I met them everywhere. I thought of them always, when I worked, when I slept. On all my papers you could have seen large eyes drawn in ink, with long, long lashes. It was an obsession.

Alas! when mother Jack went off to the Passage du Saumon, with dancing step and eyes shining with happiness and a new bow—God knows what a mad desire I had to run down the stairs after him and shout : "Wait for me!" But I did not; some inner voice warned me that it would be wrong for me to go "there", and whatever it cost me, I held out bravely at my work-bench and said :

"No, thank you, Jack, I want to work."

This went on for some time. After a while with the help of the Muse I should have no doubt succeeded in driving out the dark eyes from my mind. Unfortunately I was so

imprudent as to meet them once more; that was my undoing—I lost my head, my heart, everything. This is how it happened:

Since his confession on the river bank mother Jack had not spoken to me of his heart's affairs; but I could see from his looks that things were not proceeding as he would have wished . . . He was always sad when he returned from Pierrotte's on Sundays. At night I heard him sighing, sighing . . . If I asked him: "What is it, Jack?" he replied brusquely: "Nothing". But I understood that something was wrong with him, by the tone in which he replied. He, who was always so kind, so patient, now lost his temper with me. Sometimes he looked at me as if we had quarrelled. I guessed of course that there was some grievous disappointment at the back of all this; but since Jack obstinately persisted in keeping silent, I dared not talk of it either. One Sunday however he had come back to me even gloomier than usual and I decided to make a clean breast of it.

"Tell me, Jack, what is wrong with you?" I asked him, taking his hands in mine. "Are things not going well 'there'?"

"Well, no . . . things are not going well at all;" the poor boy answered despondently.

"I say! has anything happened? Has Pierrotte by any chance noticed something? Does he want to stand in your way?"

"Oh no, Daniel, it is not Pierrotte who stands in our way . . . It is she who does not love me and will never love me."



"What nonsense, Jack! How can you know that she will never love you? Have you as much as told her that you love her? No, you have not, have you? There you are!"

"The one whom she loves has not said anything; there was no need for him to speak—and still she loves him."

"Really, Jack? you think that the flutist . . . ?"

Jack appeared not to have heard my question.

"The one whom she loves has not spoken," he said again.

And he would not say any more.

That night there was no sleep in the belfry of St. Germain.

Jack spent almost the whole night at the window, looking at the stars and singing. And I was thinking: "If I went 'there' to look closely into the matter? . . . After all, Jack might be mistaken. Mademoiselle Pierrotte has no doubt failed to understand how much love is hidden in the folds of that tie. Since Jack dare not speak of his feelings, perhaps I should speak in his stead? . . . Yes, that's it: I shall go there and talk to the young Philistine, and see what happens."

Next day I carried out this beautiful plan, without informing mother Jack. Certainly, and God is my witness, I had no hidden design in going there: I did it for the sake of Jack alone. Still, when I sighted the former Lalouette establishment at the corner of the Passage du Saumon, with its green paint and

its 'China and Crystalware' on the shop-front, I felt a slight fluttering of the heart which ought to have warned me . . . I walked in. The shop was empty; at the back the flute-man was taking his food: even while eating he kept his instrument before him on the tablecloth. "Impossible that Camille should waver between this flute on two legs and my mother Jack . . ." I thought while going upstairs. "Well, we are going to see."

I found Pierrotte sitting at table with his daughter and the lady of great merit; very luckily the dark eyes were absent. An exclamation of surprise rose when I came in.

"At last! here he is!" cried the good Pierrotte in his thundering voice. "I may well say so . . . He will have coffee with us."

They made room for me. The lady of great merit went to fetch me a beautiful cup with gilt flowers, and I sat down beside Mademoiselle Pierrotte . . . She was very pretty that day, was Mademoiselle Pierrotte. She was wearing a small red rose in her hair, just above the ear—flowers are not worn like that nowadays—and it was a very, very red little rose. Between you and me, I believe that little rose was a fairy, so magically did it transform the little Philistine.

"And so, Monsieur Daniel," said Pierrotte with a good friendly laugh, "you won't come to see us any more!"

I tried to apologize and to talk of my literary labours.

"Yes, I know all about that! the Quartier

Latin, eh?" said Pierrotte, bursting into even louder laughter and looking at the lady of great merit, who coughed a little, with the air of one who knows, and kicked me under the table. To these good people Quartier Latin spelt orgies, fiddles, masks, crackers, broken glasses, crazy nights and so on. Ah! if I had told them of my cenobite's life in the belfry of St. Germain, how astonished they would have been! But you know how it is, when one is young one does not dislike to be taken for a wild fellow. I faced Pierrotte's accusations with a modest air and protested but feebly:

"Oh no, no, I assure you . . . it is not as you think . . ."

Jack would have had a good laugh if he had seen me.

We were finishing our coffee when a gentle tune floated up from the courtyard. Pierrotte was being called to the shop. No sooner had he turned his back than the lady of great merit also took herself off to the pantry, to play a little game with the cook. Between you and me, I believe the lady's greatest merit lay in a remarkable skill in handling cards.

When I saw that I had been left alone with the little red rose, I thought: "This is the moment!" and I had already Jack's name on the tip of my tongue; but Mlle. Pierrotte gave me no time. Averting her eyes she asked in a low voice:

"Is it Miss White-Cuckoo who prevents you from calling on your friends?"

I thought at first that she was joking; but she was not. She seemed to be much affected, judging by the scarlet of her cheeks and the quick heaving of her bodice. No doubt she had heard the others talking of White-Cuckoo and vaguely imagined things that were not . . . I could have undeceived her with one word: but some inexplicable foolish vanity prevented me. . . . Since I gave no reply, Mlle. Pierrotte turned to me, and raising her long lashes that had been lowered so far, she looked at me; but it cannot be true. It was not she who looked at me, but dark eyes, swimming in tears and filled with tender reproach. Ah! beloved Dark Eyes, delight of my soul!

It was but a short lived phantasy. Almost at once the long lashes were lowered again, the dark eyes disappeared and there was only Mlle. Pierrotte left sitting beside me. Quickly, quickly, without waiting for second vision, I started to talk about Jack. I began by saying how good, how loyal, how brave and generous he was. I told her of his untiring devotion, of his maternal love, so vigilant as to make a real mother jealous. It was Jack who fed me, clothed me, maintained me, God only knows at the cost of what hardships, what privations. But for him I should still be in the dark prison of Sarlande, where I had suffered so much, so much . . .

At this stage of my narrative, Mlle. Pierrotte appeared to be moved, and I saw a big tear glide down her cheek. In my simplicity I believed that it was for Jack, and said

to myself: "Good! things are looking well." Thereupon I increased my eloquence. I spoke of Jack's melancholy moods, and of the deep, secret love that consumed his heart. Ah! thrice happy the woman who . . .

Here the little red rose Mademoiselle Pierrotte was wearing, slipped somehow from her hair and fell at my feet. Just then I was casting about for a delicate way of explaining to young Camille that she was the thrice happy woman to whom Jack had lost his heart. The little red rose, dropping thus at the right time, showed me the way. Did I not tell you there was witchcraft in that rose?—I nimbly picked it up, but not to hand it over.

"It will be for Jack—from you," I said to Mademoiselle Pierrotte with my shrewdest smile.

"For Jack, if you wish," she replied sighing.

But in the very same instant the dark eyes reappeared and looked tenderly at me, as if to say: "No! not for Jack; for you!" Could you have seen them—how clearly they spoke, how candid in their ardent appeal, how modestly and irresistibly passionate they were! But I was still hesitating and they had to repeat two or three times: "Yes, for you, for you." Then I kissed the little red rose and hid it in my bosom.

When Jack came home in the evening he found me as usual bent over my poetical work-bench, and I let him think that I had not been out all day. Unfortunately, while I was un-

dressing, the little rose I had kept in my bosom, dropped to the ground and, rolled towards the bed—all these fairies are full of malice. Jack saw it, picked it up and looked at it for a long time. I do not know which of us was redder, I or the rose.

"I recognize it," he told me, "it is from the rose-tree they have 'there', in the drawing-room window."

Then he held it out to me and added :

"She has never given any roses to me."

He spoke so sadly that the tears started to my eyes.

"Jack, my dear Jack, I swear that never before this evening . . ."

Gently, he interrupted me :

"Do not apologize, Daniel, I am sure that you have not been false to me . . . I knew it, I knew that it was you whom she loved. Remember, I had told you that the one she loves had not said anything, there was no need for him to speak."

And the poor boy began to walk up and down the room. I stood there motionless and looked at him, holding the red rose.

"What has happened was bound to happen," he resumed after a short while, "I had foreseen all this since a long time ago. I knew that she would never care for me if she saw you . . . That was why I waited so long until I took you 'there', I was jealous of you—in advance. Forgive me: I loved her so much! . . . At last, one day I wanted to make the test and I let you come with me. Then

and there I understood, my boy, that there was no hope for me. After five minutes she looked at you as she has never looked at anyone else. You saw it too, of course. Oh! do not lie to me; you saw it. Why else should you keep away from 'there' for over a month? But, worse luck! it did not help me in any way... For souls like hers that are absent are never wrong,<sup>1</sup> on the contrary... Whenever I went there she spoke to me of nothing but of you, and so candidly, with so much confidence and affection... It was a real torture. Now all that is over. It is much better so."

For a long time Jack talked to me, always with the same gentleness, the same resigned smile. Everything he said was at the same time pleasure and pain to me; pain, because I felt that he was unhappy; and pleasure, because I saw behind all his words the dark eyes, shining at me, full of my own image.

When he was silent I went up to him; I was a little ashamed, but I still held the little red rose:

"Jack, will you not love me any more?"

He smiled and clasped me to his heart:

"Stupid, I shall love you much more."

It was the truth. The incident of the red rose brought about no change in mother Jack's affection, not even in his temper. I believe that he suffered deeply, but he never showed it. Not a sigh, not a complaint came from him. As in the past, he continued to go

<sup>1</sup> In contradistinction to the French proverb "Those who are absent are always wrong."—*Tr.*

'there' on Sundays and to show a pleasant face to all. The only change was in his tie—the fancy bows were no more. For the rest, it was the same calm and proud Jack, who worked with every ounce of his strength and walked bravely forward through life, his eyes fixed on a single aim: the reconstruction of our home... Oh Jack! my mother Jack!

As for me, from the day I was allowed to love Dark Eyes freely and without remorse, I flung myself headlong into it. I would not move from Pierrotte's. I had won all hearts there: and at the price of what pusillanimity, good God? Bringing sugar for M. Lalouette, playing cards with the lady of great merit—nothing was beyond me. In that house my name was Anxious-to-please.

Usually Anxious-to-please came towards midday. At that hour Pierrotte was in the shop and Mademoiselle Camille upstairs in the drawing-room, alone with the lady of great merit. On my arrival, the dark eyes quickly showed themselves, and immediately the lady of great merit left us alone. This noble lady, whom Pierrotte had engaged as a companion to his daughter, expected to be relieved from her duties as soon as she saw me appear. At once she would be off to the pantry, to the cook and the cards! I was not sorry for it: just imagine! all alone with Dark Eyes.

Lord! what happy hours I spent in that small yellow drawing-room! Almost every time I brought a book with me, one of my favourite poets, and read out some passages to



those dark eyes, which filled with lovely tears or shone brightly, according to the text. Meanwhile Mademoiselle Pierrotte sat with us, embroidering slippers for her father or played her eternal Rosellen Reveries for us; but we left her severely alone, I can assure you. Sometimes however, just at the most affecting passages, that little bourgeoisie would think aloud—some silly thought—"I shall have to send for the piano tuner." Or else: "I have made two stitches too many on this slipper." Then I would close the book out of vexation and not read any more. But the dark eyes had a certain way of looking at me which would placate me at once, and I would continue.

It was undoubtedly very imprudent to leave us always alone like that, in the small yellow drawing room. Imagine, that the two of us together—Dark Eyes and Anxious-to-please—were not thirtyfour years of age. It was however a good thing that Mademoiselle Pierrotte never left us; and she was a very sober, very cautious, very vigilant guard, as those who keep watch over powder magazines have to be . . . One day—I remember it well—we were sitting on a sofa in the drawing-room, Dark Eyes and I: it was a warm afternoon in May, the window was ajar and the heavy curtains were down, reaching to the ground. We were reading *Faust*. The reading over, the book slipped from my hands and we remained for a while without speaking, close together in the silent twilight. She was lean-

ing her head on my shoulder. Through the opening of her fichu I could see small silver medals shining amidst the frills . . . Suddenly Mademoiselle Pierrotte appeared between us. It was worth seeing how she drove me speedily to the other end of the sofa—and what a lecture she gave.

“What you are doing, my dear children, is very wrong indeed . . .” she told us. “You take advantage of the trust placed in you . . . You must speak to father about your plans. Well, Daniel! when are you going to speak to him?”

I promised to talk to Pierrotte in the very near future, as soon as I should finish my great poem. Our guard seemed to be satisfied by this promise; but all the same, from that day on Dark Eyes was forbidden to sit on the sofa, beside Anxious-to-please.

Oh! she was a very strict young woman, this Mademoiselle Pierrotte! Would you believe that at first she would not allow Dark Eyes to write to me? In the end, however, she gave her consent, on the express condition that all letters should be shown to her. Unfortunately Mlle Pierrotte was content with merely reading the delightful passionate letters Dark Eyes wrote to me; she would often slip in some remarks of her own as for instance:

“. . . This morning I am quite sad, I have found a spider in my cupboard. Spiders in the morning always bring bad luck.”

Or else: “Without bread and wine even love will pine.” And then the eternal refrain:

“ You must speak to father about your plans.” To which I replied invariably: “ When I shall have finished my poem ! ”

### VIII POETRY IN PIERROTTE'S DRAWING-ROOM

At last I finished it, that famous poem of mine. I brought it to an end after four months' hard work, and I can still remember that I was scarcely able to write the last lines—so much did my hands tremble with feverish excitement, pride, happiness and impatience.

It was a great event in the belfry of St. Germain. On that occasion Jack turned for one day into the Jack of old times, the bookbinding Jack of the little glue-pots. He bound a splendid copy-book for me, and insisted on copying my poem in it with his own hand; and at each verse he broke into cries of admiration and enthusiastically stamped his feet. . . . As to me, I had less confidence in my work. Jack was too fond of me; I mistrusted his praise.

I should have liked to have my poem read by some impartial and reliable person. The devil of it was that I knew nobody; though in the *Crémérie*, there had been no lack of opportunities to make acquaintances. Since we had become rich I sat at the *table d'hôte* in the back room. There were about twenty young

men there, writers, painters, architects—or to be more precise, the seeds of all these. By now the seeds have sprouted: some of those young men have become famous, and when I see their names in the papers, it wrings my heart—I who am nothing. . . .

When I joined their table all these young people received me with open arms; but since I was too shy to take part in their discussions I was soon forgotten and sat as much alone in their midst as I had been at my small table in the public room. I listened; but I did not talk.

Once a week a very famous poet came to dine with us, whose name I do not recall, but whom the artists of the *table d'hôte* called Baghavat, from the title of one of his poems. On those days we drank Bordeaux wine at eighteen sous the bottle; then, after the dessert had been served, the great Baghavat recited an Indian poem. Indian poems<sup>1</sup> were his speciality. There was one entitled: *Lakshmana*, another *Dasaratha*, another *Kalatsala*, another *Bhagiratha*, and then: *Sudra*, *Cunosepa*, *Viswamitra* . . . but the most beautiful of all was still "Baghvāt". Ah! when the poet recited *Baghavat*, the whole back room crashed. People roared, stamped their feet, jumped on tables. I had at my right a small red-nosed architect who sobbed from the first verse to the

<sup>1</sup> The spelling of these so-called Indian poems is rather curious. While some are recognizable, others are difficult to place. These are not meant to be authentic. They are written by an obscure French poet who is strongly ridiculed by Daudet. (*Translators note.*)

last, all the time wiping his eyes with my napkin. . . . I too was carried away by the tide, and shouted louder than anyone else; but at bottom I was not exactly crazy for Baghavat. Viewed closely, those Indian poems were all very much alike. There was always a lotus, a condor, an elephant and a buffalo; sometimes the lotus was called lotos for a change; but apart from the spelling, all these rhapsodies were the same: no passion, no reality, no imagination. Rhymes upon rhymes—a big mystification. . . . That was what I privately thought of the great Baghavat, and I should have judged him perhaps less severely if I too had been asked for some of my poems; but nobody asked anything of me and this made me unsympathetic. Nor was I the only one of that opinion on Hindu poetry. My left-hand neighbour did not take to it kindly either. He was a strange individual, this left-hand neighbour of mine, greasy, threadbare, shiny, with a big bald forehead and a long beard where a few strands of vermicelli were permanently entangled. He was the oldest of the table and by far the most intelligent. Like all great spirits he spoke little and did not waste his words. Everybody respected him. People said of him: “He is very clever. . . . A thinker.”

Seeing the ironic grimace which twisted his mouth as he listened to the great Baghavat's poetry, I had conceived a very high opinion of my left-hand neighbour. I thought: “Here is a man of taste, should I care to show him my poem!”

One evening—as we were leaving the table—I ordered a bottle of brandy and invited the thinker to take a little glass with me. He accepted—I knew his weakness. We drank, and I brought the conversation round to the great Baghavat; I began by speaking very ill indeed of the lotuses, the condors, the elephants and the buffaloes,—which was very daring of me: elephants are so spitefull! While I talked the thinker went on pouring brandy into his glass, without saying a word.

From time to time he smiled or nodded approvingly, and said: “Woa . . . woa . . .”

Emboldened by this initial success, I confessed that I too had composed a great poem and wished to submit it to him.

“Woa . . . woa . . .” said the thinker again, without moving a muscle.

Seeing my man so well disposed, I said to myself: “This is the right moment!” and took the poem from my pocket. The thinker showed no signs of emotion, poured out a fifth brandy, and looked quietly on while I unrolled my manuscript. But at the very last moment he placed his old drunkard’s hand on my sleeve:

“One word, young man before you begin. . . . What is your criterion?”

I looked at him in alarm.

“Your criterion!” said the terrible thinker raising his voice, “what is your criterion?”

Alas! my criterion! . . . I had none, I had never thought of having one: and this

could be easily seen from my astonished gaze, my blush, my confusion.

The thinker rose to his feet in indignation.

"What! unfortunate young man, you have no criterion? then it is useless to read your poem to me. . . . I know beforehand what it is worth."

Thereupon he deftly poured out two or three little glassfuls which were still left in the bottle, and after gulping it all down, took his hat and went out, furiously rolling his eyes.

In the evening I told Jack about my adventure and he got very angry.

"Your thinker is an idiot," he told me, "Where does it take you if you have a criterion? What the devil is a criterion? Where do they make it? . . . Have you ever heard of such a thing! . . . That old criterion-brain!"

My good Jack—there were tears in his eyes for the insult we had suffered, my masterpiece and I.

"Listen, Daniel!" he resumed after a while. "I have got an idea. . . . Since you want to read your poem, what about reading it at Pierrotte's on Sunday?"

"At Pierrotte's? Oh, Jack!"

"Why not? . . . Look here! Pierrotte is no eagle, but he is not a mole either. He has very good straight common sense. . . . As to Camille, she should be an excellent judge, although somewhat prejudiced. . . . The lady of great merit has read a great deal. Even that

old bird, Papa Lalouette, is not as obtuse as he appears to be. . . . Moreover Pierrotte knows some very distinguished Parisians who would be invited for the evening. What do you say? Do you want me to talk to Pierrotte?"

I was not at all delighted at the idea of going to the Passage du Saumon to look for judges; but I was so impatient to read my poem that I just looked a bit sulky and accepted Jack's proposal. Next day he hurried to talk to Pierrotte. Whether the good Pierrotte understood exactly what it was all about is a matter open to question; but since he saw an occasion to please Mademoiselle's children, the good man said "yes" without hesitation and immediately invitations were issued.

Never had the small yellow drawing-room witnessed such festivity. Pierrotte had invited in my honour all who were most distinguished in Chinaware circles. On the evening of the recital we had there, besides the usual personnel: Monsieur and Madame Passajon, with their son, the veterinary, one of the most brilliant students of the Alfort school; Ferrouillat junior the free-mason, a fine speaker, who recently had a thundering success at the Grand Lodge; the Fougroux, with their six daughters arranged in organ-pipe order, and finally Ferrouillat senior, a member of the Caveau,<sup>2</sup> the man of the evening. You can imagine how I felt when I saw myself facing this imposing Areopagus. Having been told

<sup>2</sup> Name of a famous French literary society of the time.—*Tr.*



that they were to judge a work of poetry, all these good people had thought it necessary to assume a countenance suited to the occasion—cold, expressionless, unsmiling. They talked gravely among themselves, in undertones, nodding their heads like magistrates. Pierrotte, who saw no reason for mystery, looked from one to the other in astonishment. When the gathering was complete we took our seats. I was sitting with my back to the piano; the audience in a semi-circle around me, excepting old Lalouette, who nibbled his sugar in his accustomed place. After a moment's hubbub silence was established, and I began to read my poem in a voice which betrayed my emotion.

It was a dramatic poem, with the pompous title *Pastoral Comedy*. In the early days of his captivity at Sarlands College, little Thingummy took pleasure in telling his pupils little fairy stories of crickets, butterflies and other small creatures. It was out of these little tales, that I had made the *Pastoral Comedy*. My poem was in three parts: but on that evening at Pierrotte's I read only the first. I ask for permission to transcribe here that fragment of the *Pastoral Comedy*, not as a choice literary morsel, but only as a piece of documentary evidence, to be added to the Story of Little Thingummy. My dear readers, imagine for a moment that you are seated in a circle in the small yellow drawing-room, and that Daniel Eysette, trembling all over, is reading aloud to you.

## ADVENTURES OF A BLUE BUTTERFLY

*The scene is in the open country. It is six o'clock in the evening : the sun is setting. When the curtain rises, a blue Butterfly and a young Ladybird, both of the male sex, are engaged in conversation, astride upon a fern. They had met in the morning and spent the day together. It is growing late and the Ladybird is about to retire.*

THE BUTTERFLY

You are not going? it is still day!

THE LADYBIRD

I ought to go home . . .

BUTTERFLY

Come, silly, stay!

'Go home so early! Pray, what for?  
Is it not dull? Four walls, a door,  
a window—that is all! Outside  
The air is sweet, the sun shines bright,  
And poppies stand in the dewy grass!  
But may be poppies are not to your taste?

LADYBIRD

'Oh, Sir! I love them!

BUTTERFLY

Then why this haste?

'Stay here with me, you little fool!  
Do you feel the breeze—how sweet and cool?

LADYBIRD

But sir! what will they say at home  
If I return so late and—

BUTTERFLY (*pushing him into the grass*)

Come!

Roll about in the grass: it is ours!

LADYBIRD (*struggles*)

No, no! I cannot keep late hours!  
'Sir, I must go—

BUTTERFLY

Pst ! can you hear ?

LADYBIRD (*frightened*)

What is it ?

BUTTERFLY

In a vineyard near  
A little quail is singing aloud,  
After a drink of grapes, no doubt  
Listen to her, what a lovely tune !  
What could be nicer ?

LADYBIRD

Oh, yes, but I fear. . .

BUTTERFLY

Be quiet !

LADYBIRD

What is it you hear ?

BUTTERFLY

Some men are coming.

LADYBIRD

Men, oh God !

(*Some men walk past*)

LADYBIRD

They are very wicked, are they not ?

BUTTERFLY

Oh yes, they are very savage indeed.

LADYBIRD

I am always afraid of being crushed by their feet.  
They are so heavy and I am so small. . .  
You, sir, are of course not very tall,  
But you have wings—so big and strong !

BUTTERFLY

Why, if you're frightened—come along!  
Climb on my back! I'll carry you.  
Mine are not toy wings, my boy, I can fly!  
With you on my back, as far and as high  
As you like and wherever you want!

LADYBIRD

Oh, thank you, Sir, but really, I can't. . .

BUTTERFLY

Can you not climb? . .

LADYBIRD

Oh yes!

BUTTERFLY

Then come!

LADYBIRD (*climbs on the butterfly's back*)

But be so good as to carry me home.  
You see, we have family payers at night  
And I must not miss them.

BUTTERFLY

Oh, that's quite right.  
Now silence on board! and up we go!  
My boy, you are not heavy at all!

LADYBIRD (*frightened*)

Oh Sir!

BUTTERFLY

What is it?

LADYBIRD

If I should fall?

BUTTERFLY

Nonsense!

LADYBIRD

I am dizzy. I feel quite blind. . .  
I should rather walk, if you don't mind!

BUTTERFLY

Close your eyes and hold on to me!  
Have you closed them?

LADYBIRD

Yes. . .

BUTTERFLY (*secretly laughing*)

Well, I see,  
That you are not of an airminded race.

LADYBIRD

Oh no!

BUTTERFLY

If air-ships are not invented so far  
It's not your fault.

LADYBIRD

Oh no!

BUTTERFLY (*alighting on a Mayflower*)

Here we are!  
Open your eyes and alight, my Lord!

LADYBIRD

I beg your pardon, this is not where I stay.

BUTTERFLY

I know! I just dropped in on our way  
at the Mayflower's—one of my closest friends.  
Let's have a drink—I am all dry—  
No harm in that!

LADYBIRD

Oh, no! I'm shy. . .  
And I'm but a humble Ladybird—  
I might be intruding—

BUTTERFLY

I give you my word,  
We shall be received like kings.

LADYBIRD

It's late. . . .

BUTTERFLY

No! the cicada still sings.  
Come! I'll introduce you, if you prefer,  
As my bastard son.

LADYBIRD

Oh, thank you, Sir!  
(timidly)

But I have no money—how can I pay?

BUTTERFLY

Come on! we get free drinks to-day!

*They enter the Mayflower. The curtain falls.  
In the second act, when the curtain rises, it is almost  
dark. The two friends are seen coming out of the May-  
flower. The Ladybird is slightly drunk.*

BUTTERFLY (offering his back)

And now we are off again!

LADYBIRD (climbs up bravely)

Yes, off we go!

BUTTERFLY

How did you find  
The Mayflower?

LADYBIRD

Oh, he is very kind,  
And his cellar is really of the best.

BUTTERFLY (looking at the sky)

Oho! we must hurry towards your nest:  
There's Phoebe showing her nose in the sky.

LADYBIRD

Hurry? must we, Sir? and why?

BUTTERFLY

I thought you had family prayers at night?

LADYBIRD

I'm almost at home now—one turn to the right—

BUTTERFLY

I am not in a hurry at all.

LADYBIRD (*effusively*)

How good you are! I can't understand  
Why everybody is not your friend.  
They call you a bounder, a real bad lot,  
A poet even! and worse, my God!  
The Beetle calls you a mountebank!

BUTTERFLY

The Beetle—of course, that lazy old crank!

LADYBIRD

And there are others

BUTTERFLY

Tell me, who?

LADYBIRD

Oh, almost all speak ill of you.  
The Snails and the Scorpions are not your friends:  
They all dislike you; so do the Ants.

(*Confidentially*)

The Spider pretends you have courted her:  
She calls you an oaf! She hates you, sir!

BUTTERFLY

Really, the Spider? What a shame!

LADYBIRD

The Caterpillars think the same.

BUTTERFLY

The Caterpillars! Ugly worms!  
But those whom you meet on intimate terms,  
Are they as ill-disposed?

LADYBIRD

That depends  
Upon the families one frequents.  
Young people think you a jolly lad,  
But the elderly feel that your morals are bad.

BUTTERFLY (*sadly*)

I see that my lovers are very few.

LADYBIRD

Alas, poor friend! and if you knew—  
The Toad cannot stand you, the Nettle bears  
You a grudge; and even the Cricket swears,  
Whenever he sees you passing by:  
"That Butt . . . butt . . . butt . . . butterfly!"

BUTTERFLY

And do you hate me as they all do?

LADYBIRD

I! I adore you! I'm devoted to you.  
To ride on your back is simply grand,  
And you take me to meet your charming friend,  
The Mayflower—what an excellent host . . .  
But am I not heavy? perhaps you would care  
To rest for a while and sit down somewhere.  
Are you not tired by your flight?

BUTTERFLY

To tell you the truth, you are not light.

LADYBIRD (*showing Mayflowers*)

Then you could rest—over there, may be? . .

BUTTERFLY

Mayflowers again?—thanks, not for me!

(*rakishly, in a low voice*)

Why should we not rather try next door? . .



LADYBIRD (*blushing deeply*)

Next door? the Rose? Oh no! not that!

BUTTERFLY (*dragging him along*)

We shan't be seen! come on, my lad!

*They enter discreetly at the Rose's. The curtain falls.*

*In the third Act . . .*

But I should not like, dear readers, to take further advantage of your patience. Poetry has not nowadays the gift of popularity I know. I will therefore put a stop to quotations and content myself with a short summary of the rest of my poem.

In the third Act, night has fallen. The two companions are seen leaving the Rose. The Butterfly wishes to take the Ladybird home to his parents: but the latter refuses to be taken home: he is completely drunk, and capers about in the grass shouting boisterously . . . . The Butterfly is obliged to carry him home. They say good-bye at the door, promising to meet again soon, and the Butterfly is left to walk alone through the dark. He too is a little drunk, but his drunkenness is a sad one: he remembers the Ladybird's revelations and asks himself with bitterness why everybody should loathe him, who has never hurt anyone . . . . It is a moonless night, the wind howls, the countryside is in deep darkness. The Butterfly is cold and frightened, but he finds comfort in the thought that his friend is safe and warm in his bed . . . Now big night birds are seen flying past on dark silent wings.

There is a flash of lightning. Evil creatures lie in ambush under the stones and chuckle wickedly, pointing at the Butterfly.

"We have got him!" they say.

And as the unfortunate Butterfly flutters about in terror, a Thistle thrusts his sword through him, a Scorpion rips open his belly with his claws, a big hairy Spider tears off a flap of his blue stain coat and at last a Bat breaks his back, with a blow of its large wing. The Butterfly falls, mortally wounded. While he writhes in death agony upon the grass the Nettles are full of joy, and the Toads say: "It serves him right!"

At dawn the Ants, on their way to work, carrying knapsacks and flasks, find the corpse by the wayside. They hardly look at it and move on—they will not bury it. The Ants do not work for nothing. . . . Fortunately a confraternity of Necrophores<sup>1</sup> happens to pass by. They are, as you know, small black insects, who have taken a vow to inter the dead. Piously they harness themselves to the deceased Butterfly and drag him towards the cemetery. A crowd of curious onlookers gathers, and everyone gives loud expression to his thoughts. . . . The small brown Crickets sitting in the sun in front of their houses, say gravely: "He was too fond of flowers."

"He flitted about too much at night," add the Snails.

And the big-bellied Beetles waddle along

<sup>1</sup> Burying-beetles —*Tr.*

in their golden suits, grumbling: "He was too much of a Bohemian!"

Among all that crowd there is not a word of regret for the poor dead; but in the surrounding fields the great lilies have closed and the cicadas do not sing.

The last scene takes place in the Graveyard. When the Necrophores have finished their task, a solemn Cockchafer, who has followed the procession, approaches the grave and begins the funeral oration, lying on his back. Unfortunately his memory fails him and he remains there for an hour, with his legs in the air, getting involved in his sentences. When the orator has concluded, everybody withdraws, and in the deserted cemetery the Ladybird, of the first scenes is seen emerging from behind a tomb. Dissolves in tears, she kneels on the fresh earth of the Butterfly's grave and says a touching prayer for her little friend who lies there.

## IX *YOU WILL SELL CHINAWARE!*

At the last verse of my poem Jack had risen in enthusiasm, ready to shout "Bravo!" but stopped short on seeing the bewildered expressions of the worthy people around him.

Indeed, I believe that had the fiery horse of the Apocalypse, irrupted into that small yellow drawing-room it would not have caused

greater amazement than did my blue butterfly. The Passajons, the Fougroux, bristling with disquiet at what they had heard, were staring at each other with large round eyes; the two Ferrouillats were making signs to each other. No sound came from anyone. You can imagine my feelings.

All of a sudden, in the midst of this general and silent consternation a voice came from behind the piano which made me start in my chair—what a voice! hoary, weak, toneless, chilly, the voice of a ghost. It was for the first time in ten years that the man with the bird's head, the venerable Lalouette, was heard to speak.

"I am very glad that the butterfly has been killed," said the queer ancient nibbling his sugar with a ferocious air, "I do not like butterflies at all."

Everybody laughed and the discussion of my poem got under way. The Caveau member found the work a little bit too long, and advised me strongly to reduce it to one or two little songs, an essentially French style. The Alfort student, being a learned naturalist, called my attention to the fact that ladybirds have wings, thus wholly depriving my fable of all probability. Ferrouillat junior maintained that he had read the whole thing somewhere.

"Do not listen to them," Jack whispered to me, "it is a masterpiece".

As to Pierrotte, he said nothing; but he appeared to be deep in thought. Perhaps the worthy man had felt, as he sat beside his

daughter during the recital, that the small hand he held in his trembled too nervously; perhaps he had intercepted a dark look that was too ardent; the fact remains that Pierrotte had—I may well say so—a very peculiar look, that he stuck for the whole evening to the young lady's skirts, that I was not able to say a single word to Dark Eyes, and that I took my leave at an early hour, without waiting to hear a new ditty of the Caveau member's who never forgave me this.

Two days after this memorable evening I received a note from Mlle. Pierrotte, which was as short as it was eloquent :

“Come quickly, father knows everything.”

And below my sweet Dark Eyes had put her signature :

“I love you.”

I confess that I was somewhat perturbed by this big news. For two days I had been running after publishers with my manuscript, and my thoughts were much less of Dark Eyes than of my poem. And then the idea of having to give an explanation to Pierrotte, the rough mountaineer, failed to appeal to me . . . So I allowed some time to pass before returning “There” despite the urgent call of Dark Eyes, and reassured myself regarding my intention with the thought: “When I shall have sold my poem.” Unfortunately I did not sell it.

In those days—I do not know whether it is the same at present—publishers were very obliging, very polite, very generous and engag-

ing gentlemen; but they had one important defect; you could never find them in. Similar to certain very tiny stars that are only seen by the big telescope at the Observatory, they were not visible to the crowd. At whatever hour you came, you were always told to come again, at some other time.

Lord! how many trips had I made to those shops! How many knobs had I turned on those glass-panelled doors! How many times did I stand before a bookseller's shopwindows, asking myself with loudly beating heart: "Should I go in or shouldn't I?" Within the shop it was warm. The place smelt of new books. It was full of small bald men, all extremely busy, who answered you from behind a counter from the top of a double ladder. As for the publisher, he was invisible . . . Evening after evening, I came home sad, dejected, tired.

"Courage," Jack would say, "to-morrow you'll have better luck."

And on the morrow I would again go into action, armed with my manuscript.

Day to day I felt it growing heavier and more cumbrous. At first I used to carry it proudly under my arm, like a new umbrella; but latterly I had grown so ashamed of it that I used to put it in my breast-pocket, with my coat carefully buttoned over it.

Eight days went by in this manner. Sunday came. Jack went as usual to dine at Pierrotte's; but he went alone. I was so weary of my hunt for invisible stars that I stayed in

bed the whole day. When Jack returned in the evening, he came and sat on my bed and reproached me gently.

"Look here, Daniel! It is very wrong of you not to go "there". The dark eyes are disconsolate, they weep, they are pining after you... We have been talking of you all evening. Oh, you rascal, she does love you!"

Poor Jack's eyes filled with tears at these words.

"And Pierrotte?" I asked timidly, "what does he say?"

"Nothing... He only seemed to be very surprised at not seeing you. You must go there, Daniel. You will go, won't you?"

"Certainly Jack; to-morrow. I promise."

During this conversation White-Cuckoo had come home and started her interminable song: Tolocototinaw . . . tolocototinaw! . . . Jack laughed:

"You'd never believe it," he said in a low voice, "Dark Eyes is jealous of our neighbour. She believes her to be a rival. I told her in vain how things stand, she would not listen to me. Dark Eyes jealous of White-Cuckoo! Funny, isn't it?"

I pretended to find this very funny also; but at the bottom of my heart I felt thoroughly ashamed at the thought that it was very much my own fault if Dark Eyes was jealous of White-Cuckoo.

In the afternoon of the next day I went to the Passage du Saumon. I should have liked to go straight upstairs to the fourth floor and

talk to Dark Eyes before meeting Pierrotte ; but he was lying in wait for me at the passage door and I could not avoid him. I had to enter the shop and sit with him behind the counter. From time to time a little tune was fluted discreetly in the back-shop.

"Monsieur Daniel," said Pierrotte with an assurance of speech and an easy elocution such as I had never expected from him, "what I want to ask you is very simple and I am not going to beat about the bush. I may well say so . . . The little girl is in love with you . . . Do you also love her sincerely ? "

"With all my soul, Monsieur Pierrotte."

"Then everything is all right. This is what I am going to propose to you. You are too young, and so is the little girl, to think of marrying before three years' hence. So you have three years' time in which to make a position for yourself. I do not know whether you intend to stay permanently in the blue butterfly-business ; but I am sure I know what I should do in your place. I may well say so. I should say good-bye to my little fairy-tales, join the former Lalouette establishment, acquaint myself with the tricks of the trade, and see to it that in three years Pierrotte, who is getting old, could find in me a partner as well as a son-in-law . . . Well, what do you say to it my friend ? "

And Pierrotte gave me a nudge and started laughing—and how ! The poor man was indeed convinced that he had overwhelmed me with joy by offering me to sell



china by his side. I had not the energy to grow angry, not even to reply: I was so overcome.

The plates, painted glasses, alabaster glass-shades were all whirling around me. From the shelves facing the counter, porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses in delicate colours looked at me scoffingly and seemed to say, brandishing their staffs at me: "You will sell chinaware!" A little farther grotesque Chinamen nodded their venerable pates as if in approval of what the shepherds had said: "Yes . . . yes . . . you will sell chinaware!" And from the depths of the back-shop the taunting and crafty flute was whistling softly: "You will sell chinaware . . . you will sell chinaware . . ." It drove you crazy.

Pierrotte thought that emotion and happiness had deprived me of speech.

"We shall talk it over this evening," he said, so as to let me recover at my leisure . . . "Now go to the little girl. I may well say so . . . she must be waiting a long time."

I went up to the little girl, whom I found in the yellow drawing-room, embroidering those eternal slippers in the company of the lady of great merit. My dear Camille will forgive me: never did Mademoiselle Pierrotte appear so much Pierrotte to me as on that day; never did her calm way of plying the needle and counting aloud the stitches cause me so much irritation. With her small red fingers, her ruddy cheeks, her peaceful air, she resembled one of those painted china

shepherdesses who had just now cried so impertinently: "You will sell chinaware!" Luckily the dark eyes were there too, slightly veiled, slightly melancholy, but so naively glad to see me that I felt deeply moved. It did not however last long. Almost on my heels Pierrotte came in. He had doubtless lost some confidence in the lady of great merit.

From that moment on the dark eyes disappeared and chinaware was triumphant on the whole line. Pierrotte was very cheerful, very talkative, quite insufferable. The "I-may-well-say-so"s fell thicker than hail. Dinner was noisy and much too long. When we rose from the table Pierrotte took me aside in order to remind me of his proposal. I had had time to recover and told him with sufficient composure that the matter required some reflection and that I should give him my answer in a month.

He was certainly very surprised at my lack of eagerness in accepting his offer, but he had sufficient good taste not to show it.

"That's all right," he said, "in a month."

And no more was said about the matter; but the blow had fallen. All through the evening the sinister and fatal "You will sell chinaware" rang in my ears. I heard it in the nibbling of the bird's head, who had arrived with Madame Lalouette and settled himself in the corner by the piano, I heard it in the flutist's trills, in the Rosellen Reverie, Mlle. Pierrotte never failed to play; I read it in the movements of all these bourgeois marionettes,

in the cut of their clothes; in the pattern of the upholstery, in the allegory on the clock—Venus plucking a rose, whence a tarnished Cupid escapes, in the shape of the furniture, in the smallest detail of the awful yellow drawing-room, where the same people said the same things evening after evening, and the same piano played the same *Reverie*, and which in the uniformity of its evenings resembled a musical tableau. The yellow drawing-room—a musical tableau! . . . Where were you concealed, beautiful dark eyes?

On my return from this annoying situation I told mother Jack of Pierrotte's proposal: Jack was even more indignant than I.

"Daniel Eysette—a chinaware merchant! Indeed! I'd like to see that!" exclaimed the good boy, his colour rising with anger. "It is like asking Lamartine to sell matchboxes or Sainte-Beuve to retail little hair-brooms! Stupid old Pierrotte! But we shouldn't be angry with him, after all the poor man does not understand. When he will see the success of your book and all the newspapers full of you, he will sing a different tune."

"No doubt of that, Jack; but my book will have to be published before the newspapers can talk of me, and I can see that it will not be published. Why not? because I can't get hold of any publisher—these people are never at home to poets. The great Baghavat himself is obliged to print his lyrics at his own expense."

"All right! then we shall do as he does,"

said Jack, thumping the table with his fist, "we shall print at our own expense."

I looked at him in stupefaction.

"At our own..."

"Yes, my boy, at our own expense. The Marquis is having the first volume of his memoirs printed just now. I meet the printer daily. He is an Alsatian with a red nose, and looks a good fellow. I am sure he will give us credit. My word! we shall pay him, by and by, as your book will be sold. So, that's settled; I'll go and see him to-morrow."

Next day Jack actually goes to see the printer and returns home in high spirits.

"It is done," he tells me with a triumphant air, "your book goes to press to-morrow. It will cost us 900 francs, a mere trifle. I shall give three promissory notes of 300 francs each, payable every three months. And now follow my reasoning closely. We sell the book at three francs the volume; we print 1000 copies; so your book must bring in 3000 francs... Yes, 3000, francs. Out of this money we pay the printer, plus the commission of one franc per book to the shops who sell the book, plus the cost of copies sent to the journalists. After this a profit of eleven hundred francs is left; it is as plain as a pikestaff. Not bad for a beginning, what?"

Not bad indeed, I should say so! No more chasing after invisible stars, no more humiliating hanging about booksellers' doors, and elevenhundred francs to be laid aside for the reconstruction of our home, into the bargain.

It was indeed a day of rejoicing in the belfry of St. Germain. How many plans, how many dreams! And on the following days, what a series of small delights, to be enjoyed drop by drop: going to the printer's, discussing the colour of the cover, watching the paper come out from the press all damp, with your thoughts printed on it, running twice, thrice, to the bookbinder's and at last returning with the first copy which you open tremblingly, with cautious fingers. Tell me! is there anything more delightful on earth?

Naturally the first copy of the *Pastoral Comedy* was by rights due to Dark Eyes. I took it to her that very evening, accompanied by mother Jack. We made a proud and radiant entrance into the yellow drawing-room. Everybody was there.

"Monsieur Pierrotte," I said, "allow me to present my first book to Camille."

And I placed the volume in the dear little hands that were trembling with joy. Oh! if you had seen the pretty "thank you" the dark eyes conveyed to me—and how they shone as they read my name on the cover! Pierrotte on the other hand was less enthusiastic. I heard him asking Jack how much a book of this kind could bring in.

"Eleven hundred francs," Jack answered, with assurance.

Then they engaged in a lengthy conversation, talking in undertones; but I did not listen to them. I gave myself up entirely to the joy of seeing the dark eyes lower their long silken

lashes over the pages of my book, and raise them again to me in admiration. My book! and Dark Eyes! both joys I owed to my mother Jack.

On our way home that night we wandered through the Odeon Galleries, to judge the effect created by the *Pastrol Comedy* in the bookshop windows.

"Wait for me," said Jack, "I am going in to ask how many have been sold."

I waited for him walking up and down the street and looking out of the corner of my eye at a certain cover—green with black stripes which sat enthroned in the middle of the shop window. Presently Jack joined me; he was pale with excitement.

"My dear boy," he said, "one has already been sold. It's a good sign."

I squeezed his hand in silence. I was too moved to speak; and in my heart I thought: "There is someone in Paris who has taken three francs from his purse to buy the product of your brain: someone who reads and judges you. Who may it be? I should like to know him." Alas, to my misfortune I was soon to know that terrible Someone.

The day after my book had appeared, I was having lunch at the *table d'hôte*, beside the formidable thinker, when Jack darted breathlessly into the room.

"Great news!" he told me, pulling me out into the street, "I am going away with the Marquis, at seven o'clock this evening. We are

going to Nice, to see his sister who is dying... We may stay there for a long time... Do not worry about your living: the Marquis doubles my salary, I shall be able to send you hundred francs a month... I say, what is wrong? you have gone quite pale. Come on, Daniel, don't be childish! Go back and finish your lunch and drink half a bottle of claret to give you courage. I am running to say good-bye to Pierrotte, to inform the printer, to have the copies sent to the journalists... I have not a minute to lose. I'll meet you at home at five o'clock."

I stared after him as he strode down the rue St. Benoît, then I went back into the restaurant: but I could neither eat nor drink, and it was the thinker who emptied the half-bottle. The thought that in a few hours mother Jack would be far away, weighed heavy upon my heart. In vain did I try to think of my book, of Dark Eyes, nothing could divert me from the thought that Jack was going away and I should remain alone, all alone in Paris, my own master and responsible for all my actions.

He joined me at the fixed time. Although he was greatly moved too, he pretended until the last minute to be very cheerful. And until the last minute he gave me proof of the generosity of his heart and of the fervour with which he loved me. He thought only of me, my well-being, my life. On the excuse of packing his trunk he inspected my linen and my clothes.

"Your shirts are in this corner, you see, Daniel . . . your handkerchiefs are there, behind the ties."

I told him : "Jack, it's not your trunk you are packing, it is my wardrobe."

When all was ready, trunk as well as cupboard, we sent for a carriage and drove to the station. On the way Jack provided me with advice of all kinds :

"Write to me often. Send me all the articles published about your book, especially the one by Gustave Planchet. I shall make a copybook and paste them in it. It will be the Eysette family's Golden Book . . . By the way, don't forget that the laundress comes on Tuesdays. Above all, don't get dazzled by your success. Evidently you will have a great success, and Parisian success is a dangerous thing. Luckily Camille will be there to guard you against temptations. First of all, Daniel, I beg you to go there often and not to make Dark Eyes weep."

Just then we drove past the Zoological Garden. Jack laughed :

"Do you remember," he said, "that we passed here one night, four or five months ago? What a difference between that Daniel and the Daniel of to-day . . . Ah! you *have* made progress in these four months!"

And he really believed it, that I had made much progress; and I too, poor fool that I was, was convinced of it.

We arrived at the station. The Marquis was already there. From a distance I could



see the queer little man, with a head like a white hedgehog, skipping up and down in the waiting-room.

"Quick, quick, good-bye!" said Jack.

And taking my head between his big hands he kissed me vigorously three or four times; then he hurried to join his tyrant.

I experienced a strange sensation as I saw him disappear. All of a sudden I felt smaller, punier, more timid, more of a child as though my brother had, by leaving me, taken away the marrow of my bones, my strength, my boldness and half my stature. I felt frightened of the crowd around me. I had again become little Thingummy:

Night was coming. Slowly, by the longest route, the most deserted quays, little Thingummy returned to his belfry. The thought of his empty room plunged him into deep dejection. He would rather have stayed in the streets till morning. Still, he had to go home.

As he passed the lodge, the porter called out to him: "M. Eysette, a letter!"

It was a small note, elegant, scented, silky: a woman's hand, more refined, more feline than Dark Eyes' writing... From whom could it be? Eagerly he broke the seal, and read, in the staircase, by the light of the gaslamp:

"Dear neighbour,

The *Pastoral Comedy* is on my table since yesterday; but it wants a dedication. You would be very kind if

you came to write it this evening, and accept a cup of tea. You understand: as among artists!

“Irma Borel

And below :

“The lady of the first floor.”

The lady of the first floor! . . . When little Thingummy read the signature a violent shudder ran over his body. He recalled her image, as she had appeared to him one morning, coming down the stairs in a whirl of velvet, beautiful, cold and stately, with a small white scar at the corner of her mouth. And at the thought that such a woman had bought his book his heart leapt with pride.

He stood for a while on the staircase, the letter in his hand, and wondered whether he should go up to his room or stop on the first floor; then suddenly Jack's admonition came back to him : “ Above all, Daniel, do not make Dark Eyes weep.” A secret foreboding warned him that Dark Eyes would cry if he went to the lady of the first floor, and that Jack would be grieved. Then he, little Thingummy, put the letter resolutely into his pocket and said to himself : “ I shall not go.”

## X IRMA BOREL

It was White-Cuckoo who opened the door to him. For—need I tell you?—five minutes after he had sworn that he would not go, that vain

little Thingummy was ringing the bell at Irma Borel's door. The horrible negress grinned as she saw him, with the smile of a good-tempered ogre, and her large glossy black hand beckoned to him to follow. After having passed through two or three very pompous reception rooms, they stopped at a mysterious little door, through which came—muffled by the rich hangings—hoarse cries, sobs, imprecations and convulsive laughter. The negress knocked and without waiting for an answer, introduced little Thingummy.

Irma Borel was alone in a rich boudoir decorated with mauve silk and flooded with light; she was striding up and down and declaiming. A loose sky-blue dressing-gown, covered with lace frills, floated about her like a cloud. One sleeve of the gown was thrown back to the shoulder, and showed a snow-white arm of flawless perfection, brandishing in place of a dagger, a mother-of-pearl paper-knife. The other hand, immersed in lace, held an open book.

Little Thingummy stood still, dazzled. Never had the lady of the first floor seemed so beautiful to him. She was less pale than she had looked at their first encounter. In fact, she was, fresh and rosy—with a rosiness that was a little veiled,—and looked like a pretty almond-blossom; and the small white scar at the corner of her lips appeared so much the whiter for it. And then her hair, that he had not seen at the first meeting, made her still more beautiful, softening that which was a

little proud and almost hard in her face. It was blond, ash-blond, powder-blond, masses of it in a soft golden haze around her head.

When the lady saw little Thingummy, she stopped short in her declamation. She threw her mother-of-pearl knife and her book on a sofa behind her, adjusted the sleeve of her dressing-gown with a lovely gesture, and came towards her visitor with her hand outstretched.

"Good evening, neighbour!" she said with a pretty smile. "You find me in the midst of passionate tragedy. I am learning the part of Clytemnestra . . . A very affecting part, is it not?"

She made him sit on the sofa by her side and the conversation began.

"You are interested in dramatic art, Madame?"

He dared not say "My neighbour."

"Oh, just a fancy, you know . . . as I have been interested in sculpture and in music . . . However, this time I think I have been caught; I am going to make my *début* at the Théâtre-Français."

Here a huge yellow-crested bird came to alight with a great flapping of wings on little Thingummy's curly head.

"Don't be afraid," said the lady, laughing at his scared face, "it is my cockatoo . . . a nice creature I have brought with me from the Marquesas."

She took the bird, stroked it, spoke two or three Spanish words to it and carried it back to a gilded roost at the opposite end of the

room. Little Thingummy opened his eyes wide. The negress, the cockatoo, the Théâtre-Français, the Marquesas...

"What a strange woman!" he thought with admiration.

The lady came back to him and the conversation continued, at first entirely about the *Pastoral Comedy*. The lady had read and re-read it several times since the previous day: she even knew some lines by heart and declaimed them with enthusiasm. Never had little Thingummy's vanity been so feasted. He was questioned about his age, his home, how he lived, whether he went into society, whether he was in love... He answered all the questions with the greatest candour, so that in an hour the lady of the first floor was thoroughly informed about mother Jack, the story of the Eysette family, and the home the children had sworn to rebuild. Not a word, however, about Mademoiselle Pierrotte. There was only some mention of a young lady belonging to high society, who was dying of love for little Thingummy, and a barbarous father—poor Pierrotte!—who thwarted their love.

In the midst of these confidences somebody came into the drawingroom. It was an old sculptor with a white mane, who used to give lessons to the lady when she learned sculpture.

"I bet," he said to her in an undertone, looking at me with a malicious eye, "I bet this is your Neapolitan coral-fisher."

"Quite right," she replied, laughing.

And she turned to the coral-fisher who appeared greatly surprised at hearing himself thus described.

"Do you not remember how we met one morning? You were bare-necked, with your shirt open, your hair in disorder, a stoneware pitcher in your hand. It made me think of those little coral-fishers one meets in the bay of Naples. And in the evening I told my friends about it: but we did not dream then that the little coral-fisher was a great poet and that at the bottom of the stone pitcher lay the *Pastoral Comedy*.

How could little Thingummy fail to be delighted, being treated with such respectful admiration? While he bowed and smiled with modesty, White-Cuckoo introduced a new visitor, who was none other than the great Baghavat, the Indian poet of the *table d'hôte*. Baghavat walked straight up to the lady, holding out a green-covered book:

"Here are your butterflies," he said, "What a queer kind of literature!"

A gesture from the lady made him stop short. He understood that the author was present, and looked towards him with a forced smile. There was a moment of silence and embarrassment, to which the arrival of a third person brought a fortunate diversion. This was the professor of elocution: a hideous little hunchback with a ghastly pale forehead, a red wig and a smile of mouldy teeth. It seems that without his hump this hunchback would have been the greatest actor of his epoch; but

since his infirmity did not allow him to tread the boards he sought comfort in his pupils and in speaking ill of all actors of the time.

As soon as he made his appearance, the lady cried :

“Have you seen the Israelite? How was she this evening?”

The Israelite was the great tragic actress Rachel, then at the height of her fame.

“She is getting worse and worse,” said the teacher, shrugging his shoulders. “That girl knows nothing... she is a goose, an absolute goose.”

“An absolute goose,” added the pupil.

And after her the two others repeated with conviction: “An absolute goose!”

After a short while the lady was asked to recite something. There was no need to urge her; she rose, took the mother-of-pearl paperknife, tucked up the sleeve of her gown and began to declaim.

Well or badly? Little Thingummy would have been very much at a loss to tell. Dazzled by the beautiful snowy arm, fascinated by the golden hair in frantic motion, he looked but did not listen. When the lady had finished he clapped his hands louder than anyone else, and also declared that Rachel was nothing but a goose, an absolute goose.

He dreamt all night of that snowy arm and that golden haze. And when morning came and he should have sat down to his poetical labours, the magical arm came again to pull him by the sleeve. Unable to work, to

go out, he proceeded to write to Jack, and tell him about the lady of the first floor.

"Ah! my boy, what a woman! She knows everything. she can do everything. She has composed sonatas, she has painted pictures. There is on her mantelpiece a pretty terra-cotta Columbine, which is her work. She has been playing tragical parts for only three months and is already doing far better than the famous Rachel. (It seems that this Rachel is decidedly nothing but a goose). In short, my boy, here is a woman you have never dreamt of. She has seen everything, she has been everywhere. All of a sudden she says: 'When I was in St. Petersburg...' and a little later she informs you that she prefers the harbour of Rio to that of Naples. She has a cockatoo brought from the Marquesas, a negress picked up in passing at Port-au-Prince. But of course you know her negress—our neighbour White-Cuckoo. In spite of her savage appearance White-Cuckoo is an excellent girl, quiet, discreet, devoted, and talks constantly in proverbs like good old Sancho. When the neighbours want to pump her about her mistress: whether she is married, whether there is a Monsieur Borel somewhere, whether she is as rich as she is believed to be, White-Cuckoo answers in her own dialect: 'Zaffai cabrite pas zaffai mouton' (the kid's business is no business of the sheep's), or: 'C'est soulié qui connaît si bas tini trou' (it is the shoe which knows whether the stocking has holes). She has some hundred



of such proverbs and the inquisitive have never the last word with her . . . By the way, can you guess whom I have met at the lady's place? The Hindu poet of the *table d'hôte*, the great Baghavat himself. He seems to be smitten with the lady and writes grand poems on her, comparing her by turns to a lotus, a condor and a buffalo; but she does not pay much attention to his tokens of devotion. Indeed, she must be quite accustomed to this kind of thing; all the artists who visit her—and I assure you that there are a great many and very famous ones too—are in love with her. She is so beautiful, so strangely beautiful! I confess that I should have feared for my heart, if it was not already occupied. Luckily Dark Eyes is there to protect me . . . My dear Dark Eyes! I shall go to spend this evening with her and we shall talk of you all the time, my Jack."

As little Thingummy was concluding this letter, there was a gentle rap at the door. The lady of the first floor had sent him, through White-Cuckoo, an invitation to see the Goose from her box in the Théâtre-Français. He would have willingly accepted, but he reflected that he had no dress coat and so was obliged to refuse. This sent him into a temper. "Jack ought to have had a dress coat made for me," he thought. "It is indispensable . . . How shall I manage without a dress coat?" In the evening he went to the Passage du Saumon, but the visit failed to brighten his mood. Pierrotte laughed too loudly, Mlle.

Pierrotte was too dark. In vain did the dark eyes make signs to him, in vain did they say softly: "Love me!" in the mystical language of the stars: the ungrateful fellow would not hear. After dinner, when the Lalouettes had come, he ensconced himself in a corner, gloomy and sullen; and while the music played its little tunes, he imagined Irma Borel enthroned in an open box, her snowy arm playing with a fan, her golden hair glittering in the light of the chandeliers. How ashamed I should feel if she saw me here!" he thought.

Several days passed without any further incidents. Irma Borel gave him no sign of life. Relations between the first and the fifth floor seemed to have been interrupted. Every night little Thingummy, seated at his workbench, heard the lady's victoria come in; and though he was not aware of it, the muffled sound of the wheels, the coachman's "The door, please!" made him start. Nor could he hear the Negress coming upstairs without feeling a stir; had he dared he would have gone and asked her for news of her mistress. . . But in spite of everything Dark Eyes still ruled supreme. Little Thingummy spent long hours with her. For the rest of his time he shut himself in his room, in quest of rhymes, to the great amazement of the sparrows who came to see him from all the neighbouring roofs; for the sparrows of Latin Land are like the lady of great merit and have funny notions about students' garrets. The bells of St. Germain on the contrary—the poor bells

which are dedicated to the Lord and are cloistered for life like Carmelite nuns—rejoiced at seeing their friend little Thingummy sitting perpetually at his table; and by way of encouragement they made glorious music for him.

In the meantime news had come from Jack. He was staying in Nice and had written in detail about his sojourn.

“What a beautiful place, my dear Daniel, and how the sea under my window would inspire you! As for me, I do not enjoy it at all—I never go out. . . . The Marquis dictates all day—infernal fellow! Sometimes, between two sentences, I look up to see a small red sail on the horizon—then quickly down again, with my nose in the paper. Mamemoiselle d’Hacqueville is still very ill. I can hear her coughing and coughing in a room overhead. I too caught a bad chill, no sooner than I landed, and it does not want to get better.”

A little further Jack said, referring to the lady of the first floor:

“Believe me, you should not go again to see this woman. She is too complex for you; and I may as well tell you, I can smell an adventuress in her. Listen! Yesterday I saw a Dutch bring in the harbour; she had made a trip round the world and was returning with Japanese masts, spars from Chile, and a crew as variegated as the map of the world. Well, my dear boy, I find that your Irma Borel resembles this ship. It is nice for a brig to have travelled much, but with a woman it’s

quite a different thing. Usually women who have been round so many countries also get easily round people... Take care, Daniel, take care! And above all, I implore you, do not make Dark Eyes weep."

These last words went right to little Thingummy's heart. Jack's persistence in keeping watch over the happiness of the girl who had refused his love, filled him with admiration. He thought: "No, Jack, do not be afraid, I shall not give her cause to weep", and at once decided firmly that he would never again visit the lady of the first floor.

Trust little Thingummy for firm decisions!

That evening, when the victoria drove under the porch, he scarcely paid heed to it. Nor did the song of the negress distract his thoughts. It was a night in September, a heavy and stormy night... He was working, with the door ajar. Suddenly it seemed to him as if the wooden stairs that led to his room had creaked. Soon he could hear a light footfall and the rustle of a dress. Surely someone was coming upstairs—but who could it be?

White-Cuckoo had returned a long time.. Perhaps the lady of the first floor had come to talk to her negress.

Little Thingummy felt his heart beating violently at this idea; but he had the courage to stay at his table. The steps were coming nearer and nearer. There was a short moment

of silence; then a light knock at the door of the negress, who gave no reply.

"It is she," he said to himself, sitting still in his chair.

Suddenly the room was filled with light and perfume. The door creaked, someone was there.

And without turning round little Thingummy asked, trembling: "Who is it?"

## XI THE SUGAR HEART

JACK has been away for two months and there is no question of return. Mademoiselle d'Hacqueville is dead. The Marquis, aided by his secretary, is airing his grief through the length and breadth of Italy, without interrupting for a single day the terrible dictation of his memoirs. Jack is overworked and finds but little time to send his brother a few lines, dated from Rome, from Naples, from Pisa, from Palermo. But though the post-mark on these letters may often change, their text never varies... Are you working?... How is Dark Eyes?... Has Gustave Planchet's article appeared?... Have you seen Irma Borel again?"

To these questions, always the same, little Thingummy invariably replies that he is working, very hard, that the sale of the book is very good, that Dark Eyes is very well, that

he has not seen Irma Borel again, nor heard anything about Gustave Planchet.

Is there any truth in all this? . . . Let us hear the answer from another letter, written by little Thingummy on a tempestuous, feverish night :

*Sunday evening, 10 o'clock.*

“MONSIEUR J. EYSETTE, PISA.

Jack, I have lied to you. I have been lying to you for the last two months. I have told you that I am working, and for two months my ink pot has been dry. I have told you that the sale of my book is good, but not a single copy has been sold in two months. I have told you that I do not meet Irma Borel, and for two months I have hardly ever left her. As to Dark Eyes, alas! . . . O Jack, Jack, why did I not listen to you? why did I meet this woman again!

“You were right, she is an adventuress and nothing more. At first I thought her clever. It is not true: whatever she says comes from somebody else. She has no brains, no feelings. She is crafty, she is cynical, she is wicked.” I have seen her, in one of her fits of fury, whip her negress without mercy, fling her to the ground, kick and stamp upon her. And this woman is a free thinker who believes neither in God nor in the devil, but accepts blindly the predictions of somnambulists and coffee-grounds. As to her talent for acting, although she may take lessons from a hunch-

backed monster and spend all her days at home with elastic balls in her mouth—I am sure that no theatre will care for her. In private life, of course, she is a wonderful actress.

“I cannot understand how I fell into the clutches of this creature, I who am so fond of all that is good and simple; but there is one thing I know, and I swear to it—that I have escaped from her, and that now everything is over, definitely over . . . If you knew what a coward I have been, and what she made of me! I told her my whole story; I spoke to her of you, of our mother, of Dark Eyes: I am dying of shame, believe me. I had opened to her my whole heart, and had told her of my whole life. But she would never give away anything of her own life. I do not know who she is, I do not know whence she comes. One day I asked her whether she had been married, and she started laughing. You know, that small scar on her lips—it is from a knife wound she received in her country, in Cuba. I wanted to know who had done this to her. She replied quite simply: ‘A Spaniard called Pacheco,’ and not a word more. Stupid, is it not? How should I know who this Pacheco is? Might she not have given me some explanation? A knife wound is after all not a natural thing! But there it is—the artists who surround her have made her famous as a strange woman, and she is anxious for her reputation . . . Oh, these artists, my dear Jack, how I loathe them. You don’t know this kind

of people: through living always among statues and paintings they come to believe that there is nothing else on earth. They talk continuously of shape, line, colour, Greek art, Parthenon, flat curves, busts. They eye your nose, your arm, your chin. They survey you for your type, your outline, your Character. But for all that throbs in our breasts, for our passions, our tears, our yearnings, they don't care a rap. These dear people have found that my head has Character, but that my poetry has none. An encouraging thought indeed!

"In the beginning of our acquaintance this woman believed that she had got hold of a little prodigy, a Great Poet of the Garret—and has she not plagued me to death with that garret! Later, when her artists' circle had proved to her that I was just an idiot, she kept me on for the character of my head. This character, however, varied according to different persons. One of her painters, who saw in me an Italian type, made me pose for a Piceraro; another for an Algerian selling violets; another—goodness knows for what else. Generally the sittings took place in her rooms, and to please her I had to wear my tinsel rags all day long and perform in her drawing room, along with the cockatoo.

"We have spent many hours like that, I as a Turk, smoking long pipes in a corner of her couch, she at the other end, declaiming with the elastic balls in her mouth, and stopping every now and then to say: 'What



a characteristic head you have, my Dani-Dan !’

“ When I was dressed as a Turk she called me Dani-Dan, when I was an Italian, Danielo : never Daniel. By the way, I shall have the honour of figuring as these two shapes at the next Art Exhibition. The catalogue will say : ‘ Young Pifferaro, for Madame Irma Borel,’ ‘ Young Fellah, for Madame Irma Borel’ . . . and it will be I ! what a shame !

“ Jack, I am going to stop for a while. I shall open the window and drink in the night air. I am choking, I cannot see any more.

“ *Eleven o’clock.*

“ The air has done me good. If I leave the window open I shall be able to continue my letter. It is raining, it is dark, the bells are ringing. How sad the room is ! . . . Dear little room—I loved it so much, before ; now I dislike it. She has spoilt it for me ; she has come too often. You understand—she had me close at hand, in the same house ; it was very convenient. Oh, this is no longer the work-room it used to be . . .

“ She came at all hours, whether I was in or not and rummaged everywhere. One evening I found her ferreting about in a drawer in which I lock up my most precious possessions : our mother’s letters, your letters, those from Dark Eyes—the last named in the gilt box that you surely remember. When I entered the

room Irma Borel was holding this box and was about to open it. I had just time to rush forward and snatch it from her hands.

"'What are you doing there?' I cried indignantly.

"She assumed her most tragical air: 'I have respected your mother's letters; but these belong to me, I want them . . . Give me the box.'

"'What for?'

"'To read the letters it contains.'

"'Never,' I told her. 'I know nothing of your life and you know all about mine.'

"'Oh, Dani-Dan,'—it was a Turkish day—'Oh, Dani-Dan, is it possible that you reproach me with this? Do you not come into my rooms whenever you like? Are you not acquainted with everybody who comes to see me?'

"While she said this in her most cajoling voice she tried to take the box from me.

"'Very well,' I said, 'since this is the case, I allow you to open it: but there is a condition . . .'

"'What condition?'

"'You will tell me where you go every morning between eight and ten o'clock.'

"She turned pale and looked straight into my eyes. I had never before mentioned this to her. Not that I should not have liked to do so! Her mysterious daily outings puzzled and alarmed me, as did the scar, Pacheco, and all the ways of her extravagant life. I wanted to know, but, at the same time I was afraid of

knowing. I felt that there was some infamous secret at the back of it all, which would oblige me to flee from her . . . Still, I dared question her that day, as you see. She hesitated for an instant, then she said with an effort, in a dull voice: 'Give me the box; you shall know everything.'

"Then I gave her the box . . . it is shameful Jack, is it not? She opened it, quivering with pleasure, and started to read the letters, —there were about twenty—slowly, in an undertone, without omitting a single line. This fresh and chaste love story seemed to interest her much. I had told her about it, but in my own way, giving out Dark Eyes as a young lady of noble birth, whose parents refused to marry her to Daniel Eysette, the plebeian; another example of my ridiculous vanity as you see.

"From time to time she paused to say: 'Quite nicely said'. Or else: 'Well, well, for a lady of noble rank . . .'

"One by one, as she finished reading them, she held them over the candle and watched them burning, with an evil laugh. And I let her do as she liked: I wanted to know where she went daily, between eight and ten . . .

"Now there was among these letters one written on Pierrotte's business paper, with a heading of three small green plates, and beneath, the inscription: 'China and Crystalware, Pierrotte, successor to Lalouette.' Poor Dark Eyes! Some day she had no doubt felt

the need of writing to me in the shop, and any paper had seemed good to her.—You can imagine what this discovery meant to the tragedienne. Till then she had believed in my story of a young noblewoman and her aristocratic parents; but when she came upon this letter she understood everything and burst into loud laughter:

“‘So that’s the patrician lady, that pearl of the nobility! He name is Pierrotte and she sells crockery in the Passage du Saumon . . . Ah! now I understand why you would not give me the box.’

“And she went on laughing and laughing.

“My dear Jack, I do not know what came over me—shame, vexation, fury . . . I saw red. I leapt at her to tear the letters from her hands. Frightened, she stepped back, got entangled in her train and fell with a loud scream. The horrible negress heard her in the next room and came at once running, nude, unkempt, black and hideous. I would not let her in, but with the back of her large oily hand she pushed me against the wall and stood between me and her mistress.

“The other had risen in the meantime and was weeping, or pretending to weep. Nevertheless she continued to rummage in the box:

“‘Do you know,’ she said to the negress, ‘do you know why he would beat me? Because I have discovered that his noble lady is not noble at all and sells plates in a lane . . .’

“‘Spurs on boots do not make a horse-

man,' said the old woman by way of a maxim.

" 'Here, look at this,' cried the actress, 'look at the love tokens his shopgirl has given him: four hairs from her pigtail and a half-penny bunch of violets! Come nearer with your lamp, Cuckoo.'

"The negress approached with her lamp; the hair and the flowers crackled in the flame. I did nothing: I stood there, aghast.

" 'Oh, oh, what is this?' continued the tragedienne unfolding a piece of tissue paper, 'a tooth? No, it looks like sugar... My word, yes! it is some symbolical sweetmeat—a little sugar heart.'

"Alas! one day, at the fair of Prés-Gervais Dark Eyes had bought that little sugar heart and given it to me saying:

" 'I give you my heart.'

"The negress was looking at it with a hungry eye.

" 'Cuckoo! you want it?' cried her mistress, 'Here! catch!'

"And she threw it into her mouth as if to a dog... I may be ridiculous, but when I heard the sugar crunch between the jaws of the negress, I shivered from head to foot. It seemed to me as if it was really the heart of Dark Eyes that the black-toothed monster devoured with so much pleasure.

"You would perhaps believe, my poor Jack, that everything was over between us after this? Well, if you had entered Irma Borel's flat on the morrow, you would have found her rehearsing the part of Herione with

her hunchback, and in a corner, near the cockatoo, you could have seen a young Turk squatting on a mat with a pipe that would have gone three times round him . . . What a characteristic head you have, my Dani-Dan!

"But at least, you will say, as a reward for your baseness you will have learnt what you wanted to know—where she went daily from eight to ten? Yes, Jack, I have learnt it, but only this morning, in the course of a terrible scene—the last, I swear it!—that I will describe to you . . . But I hear some noise—somebody is coming upstairs . . . Could it be she? is she coming to hunt me up again? She is quite able to do so, even after what happened. Wait! I shall turn the key in the lock . . . She shall not come in, do not fear.

"She must not come in."

*"Midnight"*

"It was not she; it was her negress. I should have been surprised for I had not heard her carriage come home . . . White-Cuckoo has gone to bed. Through the partition wall I can hear the gurgle of the bottle and the horrible refrain—tolocototinaw, tolocototinaw . . . Now she is snoring; it sounds like the pendulum of a big clock.

"I will tell you how the sorry affair came to an end.

"About three weeks ago the hunchback who teaches her declared that she was ripe for great successes in the field of tragedy and that

he wanted to bring her on the stage, as well as some other of his pupils.

"My tragedienne was delighted . . . As there was no theatre at hand it was decided to turn the studio of one of the crowd into a play-house and to send invitations to the directors of all Paris theatres. As to the play for the *début*, after long discussions *Athalie* was chosen. Of all the plays in the repertory *Athalie* was the one the hunchback's pupils knew best. It could be staged after a few adjustments and rehearsals of the whole thing. So, it was to be *Athalie*! Since Irma Borel was too great a lady to disturb herself, the rehearsals took place in her rooms. Daily the hunchback brought his pupils with him, four or five tall lean solemn girls draped in French cashmere shawls at 13.50 francs each, and three or four poor devils in threadbare paper suits, with the look of having been shipwrecked. The rehearsals lasted all day, except for the hours between eight and ten; for, despite the preparations for the show, the mysterious excursions had not stopped. Irma, the hunchback, the pupils, everybody was working furiously. For two days they forgot to feed the cockatoo. As to young Dani-Dan, he was left to himself. In short, everything was running smoothly: the studio was decorated, the stage built, the costumes were ready, and invitations sent out. Then, three or four days before the show, young Eliacin—the hunchback's niece, a little girl of ten—falls ill. What is to be done? Where to find

another Eliacin, a child who would be able to learn the part in three days? General consternation . . . Suddenly Irma Borel turns to me: 'I say, Dani-Dan, could you not do it?'

" 'I? you are joking . . . At my age!'

" 'Listen to him! as if he were a grown up man! My boy, you look as if you were fifteen years old; on the stage, in costume and make-up you will look like twelve . . . Besides, the part is absolutely in line with the character of your head.'

" My dear Jack, I struggled in vain, I had to submit to her wishes, as always. I am such a coward.

" The performance took place. Ah! if I had a mind for laughter, how I could amuse you with the story of that day? The directors of the Gymnase and the Théâtre-Français were expected to come; but apparently both gentlemen were busy elsewhere and we had to be content with a director from a suburb, who was dragged in at the last minute. On the whole the little family show did not go too badly. Irma Borel was much applauded. I for one found that this Athalie from Cuba was too bombastic, that she lacked expression, and spoke French like a Spanish warbler. But never mind! her friends, the artists, did not look so closely: the costume was genuine, the anklets slim, the line of her neck graceful, that was all they wanted. As to me, the character of my head won me a brilliant success also, less brilliant however than the success of White-Cuckoo in the dumb part of



the nurse. It is true that the head of the negress had still more character than mine. And indeed, when she appeared in the fifth act holding the huge cockatoo, on her fist—'her Turk, her negress, her cockatoo': the tragedienne had wanted all of us to figure in the play—and wildly rolled her big white eyes, with an expression of surprise, the whole house broke into a tremendous applause.

"'What a success!' said the beaming Athalie.

"Jack! Jack! I can hear her carriage coming in. Oh, the wretched woman! whence is she returning so late? Has she forgotten our horrible scene this morning? and I am still trembling at the memory of it. The gate has closed again... She must not come upstairs! You see, Jack, it is terrible to live so near a woman one loathes.

*"One o'clock*

"The representation I was telling you about, took place three days ago.

"During these three days she has been cheerful, gentle, affectionate, charming. She has not once beaten the negress. Several times she has enquired about you, asking whether you had still that cough; though God knows that she does not love you... I ought to have suspected something.

"This morning she came into my room at the stroke of nine. Nine o'clock! I had never seen her at that hour. She came close to me and said smiling: 'It is nine o'clock!'

"Then suddenly she grew solemn. 'My friend,' she said, 'I have deceived you. I was not free when we met. There was a man in my life when you appeared; a man to whom I owe luxury, leisure, everything I possess.'

"Did I not tell you, Jack, that there was something shady behind this mystery?

"From the very day I met you this connection has become hateful to me... I have not told you about it, because I knew you to be too proud to share me with another man. Nor did I sever it, because it was hard to renounce this indolent and luxurious life for which I am made. Now I cannot live like this any more... This lie weighs on me, this daily deception drives me mad. And if you still want me, after this confession, I am ready to part with everything and to live with you in a corner, wherever you like.'

"She said these last words 'wherever you like' in a whisper, quite close to me, almost on my lips, so as to make me lose my head.

"I had however, the strength to reply, and very drily too, that I was poor, that I did not earn my livelihood and could not have her maintained by my brother.

"At this answer she lifted her head with a triumphant look:

"Very well! What would you say if I had found for both of us a secure and honourable means of earning our bread without having to separate?'

"Then she took from her pocket a document covered with illegible scrawls and read

it out to me. It was a letter of appointment for both of us in a theatre of a Paris suburb; hundred francs a month for her, fifty for me. Everything was settled, we had only to sign.

"I looked at her terrified. I felt that she was dragging me into an abyss and for an instant I was struck with fear lest I should not be able to resist. When she had finished reading her scrawl of a contract, she did not wait for my reply, but started talking feverishly of the splendours of a theatrical career and of the glorious life we should lead there—free, proud, far from the world, dedicated to our art and our love.

"She talked too much; it was a mistake. I had time to recover, to invoke my mother Jack in my heart, and when she had finished, was able to tell her very coolly: 'I do not want to be an actor.'

"She persisted, of course, and resumed her beautiful discourse. But it availed her nothing. Whatever she said, I gave the same answer:

" 'I do not want to be an actor.'

"She was beginning to lose her patience.

" 'So you prefer,' she said, turning pale, 'that I should again go there, between eight and ten, and that everything should remain as it is now?'

"To this I replied a little less coldly:

" 'I prefer nothing... I think it creditable on your part that you want to earn your living instead of relying upon the generosity of an eight-to-ten gentleman. I only repeat

that I do not feel any vocation for the theatre and that I shall not become an actor.'

"At this she flared up: 'Ah! you do not want to be an actor. What will you be then? Do you think by any chance that you are a poet?... He believes himself to be a poet!... But you have not an ounce of talent, you poor fool! Would you believe it? because of that miserable book he has got printed and that nobody wants to buy he fancies himself a poet! unhappy wretch, your book is idiotic, everyone tells me so. It has been for sale for two months and a single copy only has been sold—mine! You a poet! come on! Nobody, except your brother will believe in such nonsense. There is another big blockhead for you, with his nice letters; and isn't he killing with his "articles by Gustave Planchet". In the meantime he works himself to death for you: and you... you... what are you doing? have you as much as thought of it?... You are satisfied with yourself because your head has some character; you dress up as a Turk and think that is enough! Let me tell you that for some time your head has been losing its character—you are ugly, very ugly. There! look at yourself! If you returned to your Pierrotte damsel I am sure she would not have you again. What a pity! you are so well matched—both of you are born to sell china in the Passage du Saumon. That's what you are fit for—not for the theatre.'

"She was slavering and choking with rage. You have never seen such sight. I

looked at her without saying a word. When she had finished, I went up to her—I was trembling from head to foot—and told her quite clamly: ‘I do not want to be an actor.’

“With these words I went to the door, opened it and pointed towards the exit.

“‘You want me to go?’ she said with a sneer. ‘Oh, not yet . . . I have still a great deal to tell you.’

“Then I felt I could not stand it any longer. A wave of blood rushed to my face. I took one of the fire dogs from the fireplace and ran towards her. Believe me, she beat a quick retreat . . . My dear Jack, at that moment I could understand that Spaniard, Pacheco.

“No sooner had she gone than I took my hat and went out. I have been running about all day, aimlessly, like a drunken man. Ah! why were you not here! There was a moment when I thought of going to Pierrotte to throw myself at his feet and to implore Dark Eyes’ forgiveness. I went as far as the shop door but I dared not enter . . . I have not been there for two months. They wrote and I did not reply. They came to see me and I hid myself. How could I be forgiven? . . . Pierrotte was sitting at the counter. He looked sad. I stayed there for a while looking at him. Then I fled away in tears.

“When darkness fell I came home. I cried for a long time standing at the window. Then I started to write this letter to you. I shall go on writing all night. It seems to me

that you are here, that I am talking to you, and it makes me feel better.

"What a monster this woman is! How sure she was of me! She believed me to be her thing, her toy! Think of it—she would take me with her to become a comedian in the suburbs! . . . Advise me, Jack, I am in great trouble, I am in pain. She has hurt me badly, you know. I do not believe in myself any longer, I have doubts, I am afraid. What shall I do? Work? . . . Alas! she is right, I am no poet, my book does not sell . . . And how will you manage to pay for it?

"My whole life is spoilt. I see no light, I cannot think, everything is dark around me . . . . There are names which carry a fate: her name is Irma Borel. 'Borel', in our dialect means a hangman. Irma Hangman . . . how well the name fits her! . . . I should like to shift from here. This room has become hateful to me. And there is the risk of meeting her on the staircase. If she should ever come up here—don't worry, I know what to do! But she will not come again. She has forgotten me. The artists are there to comfort her.

"Oh my God! what is that? Jack, my brother, she is coming. I know that it is she. She is coming here; I can recognize her step . . . She is here, quite close.. I can hear her breathing . . . Her eye is glued to the keyhole, her gaze is upon me, is burning me, she . . ."

This letter was not mailed.

## XII *TOLOCOTOTINAW*

I HAVE NOW reached the darkest page of my story, the days of misery and shame that Daniel Eysette spent by the side of this woman, as an actor in the suburbs of Paris. Strangely enough this period of my life—eventful, noisy, full of turmoil—has left me with remorse rather than remembrance.

There is a mist in that corner of my memory, I cannot see anything clearly.

Wait! . . . I have but to close my eyes and hum a few times the weird and melancholy refrain: *Tolocototinaw . . . tolocototinaw . . .* and at once the slumbering memories will awake, as if by magic, the dead hours will emerge from their grave and I shall once more see before me little Thingummy as he was then, living in a large new house on Boulevard Montparnasse, between Irma Borel rehearsing her parts and White Cuckoo ceaselessly chanting: *Tolocototinaw . . . tolocototinaw . . .*

Ugh! what a horrible house! I can see it now, I can see its countless windows, the green filthy balustrade, the gaping sinks, the numbered doors, the long white corridors which smelt of fresh paint; quite new and already soiled! There were eight hundred rooms in that house, and in each room lived a family. And what families they were! All day long there were quarrels, shouts, uproar and fighting; at night the screaming of

children, then the patter of bare feet on the wooden floor and the heavy monotonous sound of rocking cradles, and from time to time raids by the police, for a change. It was there, in that seven-storied mansion of furnished lodgings that Irma Borel and little Thingummy had sought shelter for their love. A dismal dwelling, well suited to house such tenants! They had chosen it because it was near their theatre; and also because it was cheap, like all new buildings. For forty francs—a rent meant to attract the first tenants into the damp new walls—they had two rooms on the second floor, with a strip of balcony over the boulevard—the finest apartment in the house. They used to come home towards midnight, after the performance. It was a sinister walk through the wide deserted avenues, where silent men in blouses went prowling, and bare-headed women and the greatcoats of the night patrols. They walked fast, along the middle of the road. At home they would find some cold food in a corner of the table and White-Cuckoo, the negress, waiting for them. Irma Borel had kept White-Cuckoo. Mr. Eight-to-Ten had taken away his coachman, his furniture, his crockery, his carriage. Irma Borel had kept her negress, her cockatoo, a few trinkets and all her gowns. Of course the latter were of no use to her now, except on the stage, as long trailing skirts of velvet and moire silk are not made for sweeping the pavements of the outer boulevards . . . The dresses alone occupied one of the two rooms. They



were hung on steel coat rails all round the room, and their heavy silken folds, their flashy colours formed a strange contrast with the faded woodwork of the floor and the shabby furniture. The negress slept in this room.

She had placed there her straw pallet, her horseshoe and her brandy bottle; but she was not allowed to have a light, for fear of a fire. Thus, when they came home at night, White-Cuckoo, squatting on her pallet among the mysterious gowns lit up by the moon, looked like an old witch appointed by Bluebeard to watch over his seven hanged wives. The other and smaller room was for them and the cockatoo. There was just enough room for a bed, three chairs, a table and the great roost with the gilded rods.

Dreary and small though their lodgings were, they never went out. They spent the time that was not occupied by the theatre at home studying their parts: and believe me, they raised a frightful charivari. Their dramatic yells could be heard from one end of the house to the other:

"My daughter! give me my daughter!"

"To me, Gaspard! to me!"

"His name, tell me his naaame!"

On top of it came the cockatoo's piercing screams and White-Cuckoo's shrill voice in its eternal sing-song: "Tolocotinaw, tolocotinaw."

Irma Borel was happy. She liked this

kind of life; it amused her to play at being a couple of penniless artists.

"I do not regret anything," she used to say.

What should she have regretted? The day she would feel weary of poverty, of drinking cheap wine and eating the meagre portions with the hideous brown sauce sent up from the dingy eating-house, the day she would be disgusted with suburban dramatic art—that very day she would resume her old life, and she knew it well. She had only to lift one finger and would recover all that she had lost.

It was this rear-guard thought that gave her courage and made her say: "I do not regret anything." She did not regret anything: but he? did he?

They had both made their debut in "Gaspardo the fisherman", one of the most beautiful specimens of tin pot melodrama. She was much applauded in this play: certainly not for her talent—her voice was bad, her movements ridiculous,—but for her snowy arms and velvet gowns. The public of that locality was not accustomed to such exhibitions of dazzling skin and glorious frocks at forty francs a year. The audience murmured: "She is a duchess!"—the boisterous lads of the Paris suburbs were amazed and delighted and clapped their hands wildly.

He was not such a success however. The public found him too short of stature; and then he was afraid, he was ashamed. He spoke in whispers, as if he were at confession.

"Louder! louder!" the audience shouted.

But his throat seemed to contract, choking the words. They whistled and hissed at him. He could not help himself; whatever Irma might say, he had no vocation. After all, you cannot be a good actor just because you are a bad poet.

The Creole woman did her best to comfort him:

"They have not understood the character of your head," she used to tell him.

The director however made no mistake about the character of his head. After two tempestuous performances he called him into his office and said:

"My boy, tragedy is not in your line. We have made a blunder. We shall try you in Vaudeville. I think you will do very well in comical parts."

From next day he played in Vaudevilles. He played the parts of comical lovers, of foolish dandies who are made to drink purgatives instead of champagne and scutter about on the stage clasping their bellies, of red-wigged boobies who weep like calves: "Boo! ... hoo! ... hoo!" amorous lads who roll their eyes stupidly mumbling: "I loves you, miss! heigho! I loves you so much ..."

Thus he played the parts of simpletons, and cowards and of all those who are ugly, who make people laugh; and truth compels me to say that he did not do it too badly. Now the unfortunate boy was a success: he was really comical.

Incredible though it may seem : it was on the stage, when he was bedaubed with paint and draped with fantastic rags that little Thingummy thought of Jack and of Dark Eyes. It would be in the middle of a grimace, or some silly pun, that the image of those he loved and had so basely betrayed would suddenly rise before him.

It happened practically every night, as the jolly lads of the suburbs could tell you, that he stopped short in the very middle of a tirade, and stood still, open-mouthed, looking at the audience. In those moments his soul slipped from him, leapt over the foot-lights, burst through the ceiling, and took wing towards far distant places to give a kiss to Jack, another to Madame Eysette, to beg mercy of Dark Eyes, complaining bitterly of the sordid job it was compelled to do.

"Heigho! I loves you so much!" the prompter's voice would say all of a sudden. Then the unhappy little Thingummy—torn from his dream, and dropped from his heaven would look about him with large astonished eyes exhibiting so natural, so comical a bewilderment, that the entire audience would burst into a shout of laughter. In theatre slang this is called a hit. Unwittingly he had made a hit.

The company to which he belonged catered for several districts. It was a sort of travelling troupe, which played by turns at Grenelle, at Montparnasse, Sceaux, Saint-Cloud. They travelled from one place to

another packed in the theatre omnibus—an old coffee-coloured bus drawn by a consumptive horse. On the way they sang, and played cards, while those who did not know their parts well sat at the back and re-read them. That was his place.

He sat there silent and sullen as the great comical actors are, his ears shut to the buzz of trivial talk around him. However low he might have fallen, this crowd of itinerant mummers was still beneath him. He was ashamed of being in such company. The women,—aged, pretentious, withered, painted, affected, sententious. The men—vulgar creatures without any ideals, hardly literate, sons of hairdressers or fried-fish-vendors, who had become actors for want of work, and laziness, or for the sake of tinsel costumes, and a desire to show themselves on the stage in delicate-coloured tights or elegant frock coats: suburban Lovelaces, who were eternally pre-occupied with their attire, spending their salaries on hairdressing devices. They would say to you with an air of conviction: "I have done a lot of work to-day," when they had spent five hours in making a pair of Louis XV boots out of two yards of glazed paper. Fancy scoffing at Pierrotte's musical drawing room, only to get landed in this rickety dirty coach.

His companions disliked him because of his sulky moods and his conceited silence. "He is a deep one," they used to say.

The Creole woman on the other hand had contrived to win all hearts. She sat enthroned

in the omnibus, like a princess in her sunniest mood, full of laughter, throwing her head back to show the beautiful lines of her shoulder. She addressed everybody by his Christian name, calling the men "old boy", and the women "darling", so that even the most cross-tempered was impelled to say: "She is a good girl."

A good girl indeed!—what a mockery!

Thus bumping along, laughing and firing heavy jokes at each other, they would reach the place where they were to perform. The show over, everybody undressed in the twinkling of an eye and hurried to board the carriage, bound for Paris. By then it would be dark. There were whispered conversations, knees searching in the darkness for other knees. From time to time a stifled laugh . . . At the Faubourg du Maine toll-gate the omnibus stopped: from there it would be driven to the coach house. They descended and the whole crowd would escort Irma Borel to the door of their large hovel where White-Cuckoo, half drunk, was waiting for them with her melancholy: "Tolocototinaw, tolocototinaw."

Seeing them thus riveted together one might have thought that they loved each other. But they did not. They knew each other too well for that. He knew her to be cold, unfeeling, deceitful and a liar. She knew that he was so weak and yielding as to be vile. She thought: "Some day his brother will come to take him away and give him back to his china-shop girl." He said to himself: "One of these

days she will get tired of this life and flit away with some Mr. Eight-to-Ten; and I shall be left alone, stuck in this mire." Their constant fear of losing the other was the brightest of their mutual feelings. They did not love each other, and yet they were jealous.

Strange, is it not? that there may be jealousy where there is no love? Still, such was the case with them. If she spoke familiarly with some member of the company, he turned pale. If he received a letter she would fling herself upon it and tear it open with trembling hands. Usually it was from Jack. She would read it through chuckling and then throw it from her: "Always the same!" she said with contempt.

Alas! yes, always the same, that is to say the same unselfish devotion, and noble abnegation. It was indeed for this that she detested his brother so much.

Poor Jack was quite unaware of it all. He did not suspect anything; he was told that all was going well, that the *Pastoral Comedy* had nearly sold out and there would be plenty of money at the booksellers' for the payment of the promissory notes. Trusting and generous as ever, he continued to send the monthly hundred francs to Rue Bonaparte, which White Cuckoo went to fetch. With Jack's hundred francs and the salaries they received from the theatre they had certainly enough to live upon, especially in that wretchedly poor neighbourhood. But neither of them knew, as the saying goes, the value of money; he did

not, because he had never had any; and she because she had always had too much. No wonder there was confusion and squandering. The cash box—a small Javanese straw slipper—was empty as early as the fifth of the month. There was first of all the cockatoo, which was as expensive to feed as a fullgrown person. Then they needed cosmetics, powder, kohl, pearl-white, the whole apparatus of theatrical make-up. Then the bindings of the books supplied by the theatre were too old and faded; Madame wanted them new. She also needed flowers, lots of flowers. She would have gone without food rather than see her flower vases empty.

Within two months the household was over head and ears in debt. They owed money to the landlord, to the restaurant, to the door-keeper at the theatre. From time to time a tradesman would lose his patience and come of a morning to make a row. On such days one ran quickly to the printer of the *Pastoral Comedy*, as a last resource, and borrowed a few louis, on Jack's behalf. The printer who had the second volume of the famed memoirs in hand and knew Jack to be still M. d'Hacqueville's secretary, opened his purse without suspicion. By and by they had borrowed four hundred francs from him, which brought, added to the nine hundred francs for the *Pastoral Comedy*, Jack's debt up to 1300 francs.

Poor mother Jack! how many disasters awaited him on his return! Daniel vanished,



Dark Eyes in tears, not a single volume sold and 1300 francs to be paid! How would he solve all these problems? . . . The actress did certainly not worry over it, but he, little Thingummy, was never rid of this thought. It obsessed him and kept him in permanent anxiety. He tried in vain to divert his thoughts, to work like a galley-slave—and what kind of work it was, good Lord!—to learn new clown's jests, to study new grimaces in front of the mirror: the mirror always reflected Jack's image instead of his own; between the lines of his part he saw, instead of Langlumeau, Josias, and other vaudeville characters only the name of Jack: Jack, Jack, always Jack.

Every morning he looked at the calendar with dread; he counted the days up to the date of expiry of the first promissory note and thought with a shudder: "Only a month, only three weeks more!" He knew well that at the first protest against non-payment everything would be discovered and that his brother's martyrdom would begin on that day. Even in his sleep he was haunted by this thought. Sometimes he would wake with a start, his heart gripped by fear, his face streaming with tears, vaguely remembering a strange and terrible dream.

This dream, always the same, recurred nearly every night. It took place in a strange room: there was a large clothes-press purpled with old-fashioned ironwork creepers. Jack was lying there, pale, horribly pale, stretched

out on a sofa : he was dead. Camille Pierrotte was there too ; she stood before the press, trying to open it in order to take out a shroud. But she could not ; and while she fumbled with the key at the lock, he heard her say in a heart-rending voice : " I cannot open it. I have wept too much . . . Now I cannot see any more."

This dream affected him beyond any reason, however much he struggled against it. No sooner had he closed his eyes than he would see Jack stretched out on the sofa and Camille in front of the press, blind with tears. All this remorse, all this terror made him grow from day to day gloomier and more irritable. Nor was the Creole woman endowed with greater patience. She also sensed vaguely that he was slipping from her grip—she did not know how—and this exasperated her. Every moment there were frightful scenes, screams, insults,—you might have thought yourself on a washerwoman's boat . . .

She would say : " Run away to that Pierrotte woman of yours ; she will give you sugar hearts."

And he retorted at once : " Go back to your Pacheco ; he will slash your mouth."

She called him : " Bourgeois ! " and he answered : " Slut ! "

Then they would dissolve in tears and generously forgive each other, only to begin afresh next day.

Thus they lived, no ! they rotted, fettered together, in the same gutter. This ilfe of dis-

honour with its hours of misery arise before my eyes to-day, whenever I hum the weird and sorrowful song: "Tolocototinaw . . . . tolocototinaw . . ."

### XIII THE RESCUE

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, at the Montparnasse theatre. Little Thingummy, who acted in the first play, had finished and was on his way upstairs to his dressing room. On the stairs he passed Irma Borel whose turn it was on the stage. She was resplendent in velvet and lace, with a fan in her hand, in the role of Célimène.

"Come into the house," she told him in passing, "I feel up to the mark to-night... I shall be very beautiful."

He quickened his steps towards his dressing room and undressed in a hurry. This dressing room, which he shared with two colleagues, was a low-ceilinged windowless closet; the furniture consisted of two or three straw-bottomed chairs, the walls were hung with broken pieces of mirrors, with tousled wigs, spangled rags, faded velvets, tarnished gilt stuff; in a corner were rouge pots without covers and tattered powder puffs lay on the ground.

Little Thingummy had been there for a while, ridding himself of his clown's attire,

when he heard one of the scene-shifters calling him from downstairs: "M. Daniel! M. Daniel."

He left the dressing room and bending over the damp wood of the handrail, asked: "What is it?"

There was no answer and he went downstairs, as he was, half-clad, daubed with rouge and white paint, his big yellow wig falling over his eyes. At the foot of the staircase he collided with somebody.

"Jack!" he exclaimed, drawing back.

It was Jack. They looked at each other for an instant, without speaking, then Jack clasped his hand; his voice was very gentle and full of tears as he whispered: "Oh, Daniel."

This was enough. Little Thingummy, stirred to the depth of his soul, looked about him like a frightened child, and said, so softly that his brother could hardly hear him:

"Take me away from here, Jack."

Jack started; then taking him by the hand, he led him into the street, where a cab was waiting. They got in.

"Rue des Dames, in Batignolles!" cried mother Jack.

"That's where I live," replied the coachman cheerfully, and the carriage moved off.

Jack had been in Paris for two days. He had come from Palermo, where a letter from Pierrotte had at last found him, after having followed him for three months. This letter

informed him in a few blunt words of Daniel's disappearance.

Jack read it and guessed everything. He thought: "That boy is doing some foolish thing... I shall have to go." And then and there he asked the Marquis for leave.

The old fellow gave a jump. "Leave!" he said, "Are you mad? and what about my memoirs?"

"Only eight days, Monsieur le Marquis; just enough time to travel to Paris and back. My brother's life is at stake."

"I don't care a straw for your brother. Did I not warn you when I engaged you? Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"I have not, Monsieur le Marquis, but..."

"There is no 'But!' What has happened to the others will happen to you too: if you leave your post for a week you shall never return to it. Think that over, will you?... And look here! while you think it over sit down: I shall dictate."

"I have thought it over, M. le Marquis: I am going."

"Go to the devil."

And with this the intractable old gentleman took his hat and went off to the French Consulate to enquire about a new secretary.

Jack left the same evening.

Arriving in Paris he hastened to Rue Bonaparte.

"Is my brother upstairs?" he called out to the porter, who was smoking his pipe in the courtyard, astride of the water pump.

The doorkeeper laughed.

"It's quite nice weather we are having," he said slyly.

He wanted to make a show of discreet reserve, but a two-franc piece loosened his tongue. He reported that the lad of the fifth floor and the lady of the first had disappeared a long time ago, that they were hiding somewhere in Paris—nobody knew exactly where—but surely together, since the negress came once a month to see whether there was any mail for them. He added that M. Daniel had forgotten to give him notice before leaving and still owed him the last four months' rent, not to speak of other minor debts.

"Very well," said Jack, "everything will be paid."

And without losing a minute, without even stopping to shake off the dust of the journey, he set out to search for his child.

First he went to the printer's, rightly thinking that Daniel would often come there, this being the main depot of the *Pastoral Comedy*.

"I was going to write to you," the printer said as soon as he saw him, "You know, the first note falls due in four days."

Jack replied, unmoved:

"I have thought of it. To-morrow I shall make a round of the bookshops and collect the money. The book has sold very well."

The printer opened his blue Alsatian eyes inordinately wide:

"What's that? The book has sold well? Who told you that?"

Jack turned pale with the presentiment of a catastrophe.

"Look at that corner," continued the Alsatian, "do you see that pile of books? That's the *Pastoral Comedy*. It has been in the market for five months and not more than one copy has been sold. At long last the book-sellers have grown tired of it and have returned the volumes they had in stock. Now there is no use for it except to sell it for what the paper is worth. It's a pity; it was well printed."

Each word fell upon Jack's head like a blow from a loaded stick, but the heaviest of all was the information that Daniel had borrowed money from the printer in Jack's name.

"Not later than yesterday," said the pitiless Alsatian, "he sent a horrible negress, asking for two louis; but I refused point blank. First because this mysterious messenger with a head like a flue inspired little confidence in me; and then, you understand, M. Eysette, I am not a rich man, and I have already advanced more than four hundred francs to your brother."

"I know," replied mother Jack proudly, "but do not worry, this money will soon be repaid."

Then he went out very quickly, lest his emotion should become apparent. On the road he was obliged to sit down on a mile-

stone. His legs were giving way. His child run away—the loss of his employment—the printer's money to be repaid—the room—the doorkeeper—all payments due in three days—these things whirled and buzzed in his brain . . . Suddenly he rose to his feet. "The debts," he said to himself, "they have to be settled first." And in spite of his borther's shameful behaviour towards the Pierrottes he did not hesitate to approach them.

On entering the shop of the "former Lalouette establishment", Jack saw behind the counter a heavy bloated yellow face that he at first failed to recognise. But at the sound of the opening door the face looked up, and seeing who had entered, uttered a cry of "I may well say so!" that could not be mistaken . . . Poor Pierrotte! His daughter's grief had made a different man of him. The jovial, florid-faced Pierrotte of old was gone. The tears that his little girl was shedding for five months had reddened his eyes and thinned his cheeks. On his pale lips the hearty laughter of past days had given place to a cold, silent smile, the smile of widows and forsaken sweethearts. He was Pierrotte no longer—he was Ariane, he was Nina.

Except for him nothing had changed in the former Lalouette establishment. The painted shepherdesses, the purple-bellied Chinamen were still blissfully smiling on the tall shelves, among Bohemian glasses and flowery painted plates. The plump soup-tureens, the painted porcelain lamps still



glistened here and there in the same show-cases and in the backshop the same flute was still discreetly cooing.

"Pierrotte, it is I," said mother Jack, steadying his voice, "I have come to ask you for a great favour. Lend me fifteen hundred francs."

Without replying Pierrotte opened his cash-box and rummaged among some coins; then he closed the drawer and rose quietly to his feet.

"I have not got the money here, Master Jack. Wait for me, I shall fetch it from upstairs."

As he was leaving the shop, he added in a strained voice :

"I shall not ask you to come upstairs; it would hurt her too much."

Jack sighed: "You are right, Pierrotte, I had better not go upstairs."

Pierrotte returned after five minutes with two thousand-franc notes, and put them in Jack's hand. Jack would not take them.

"I need only fifteen hundred francs," he said.

But the other insisted :

"Keep the whole, Master Jack, if you please. I insist on this sum of two thousand francs. It is exactly what Mademoiselle had lent me at the time, to pay for a substitute. If you refuse it, I may well say so, I shall be mortally offended."

Jack dared not refuse. He put the money

in his pocket and holding out his hand, simply said :

“Good bye, Pierrotte, and thank you.”

Pierrotte grasped his hand. They stood thus for a while, face to face, deeply moved and silent. Both had Daniel's name on the lips, but the same sense of delicacy forbade them to pronounce it. These two—a father and a mother—understood each other so well! Jack was the first to gently disengage his hand. He felt the tears coming: he was in a hurry to leave. Pierrotte accompanied him into the lane. There the poor man could no longer restrain the bitterness which filled his heart, and he began reproachfully :

“Ah! Master Jack... Master Jack... I may well say so!” But he was too affected to complete the translation of his thoughts and could only repeat,

“I may well say so... I may well say so!”

Oh yes, he might indeed well say so!..

Leaving Pierrotte Jack returned to the printer. In spite of the Alsatian's protests he insisted on paying back at once the four hundred francs lent to Daniel. In addition he gave him money for the three promissory notes, so as to rid himself of this worry. Feeling easier at heart, he said to himself : “Let's look for the child now.” Unfortunately it was too late to start the hunt the same day; besides, poor Jack was so exhausted by the journey, the shock, and the incessant dry cough that was wearing him down for a long

time that he had to return to Rue Bonaparte and get some rest.

Ah! when he entered the small room and saw by the last light of an old October sun all those objects which spoke to him of his child: the poetical workbench in front of the window, his glass, his pipes, short-stemmed like Abbé Germane's; when he heard the dear bells of St. Germain—their voices a little hoarse with the fog;—when the evening "Angelus"—the melancholy "Angelus" Daniel loved so much—came fluttering and knocked on the wet window panes: what mother Jack suffered then, only a mother could tell.

He took two or three turns round the room, looking into all corners, opening the cupboards, in the hope of finding something that would put him on the runaway's trail. Alas! the cupboards were empty. Nothing but some old linen in tatters had been left behind. A sense of disaster and flight pervaded the whole room. A candlestick lay in a corner on the floor, and in the fireplace a white box with gold threads lay under a heap of charred papers. He recognized that box; it used to hold the letters from Dark Eyes. Now he found among the ashes. What sacrilege!

Continuing his search he found in a drawer of the workbench a few loose sheets of paper, covered with irregular feverish writing, the writing of Daniel when he was inspired. "A poem, no doubt," thought mother Jack,

drawing nearer to the window in order to read it. It was indeed a poem, a gloomy poem, that began with the words:

"Jack. I have lied to you. I have been lying to you for two months." This letter had not been posted; but, as you see, it had nevertheless reached its destination. Providence had for once done the work of the post.

Jack read it from the first word to the last; when he reached the passage which spoke of an engagement in the Montparnasse theatre, proposed with so much insistence, and so firmly refused, he leapt for joy.

"I know where he is!" he exclaimed.

He pocketed the letter and went to bed, feeling somewhat relieved. But he did not sleep, although he was aching with fatigue; always that accursed cough.... At the first greeting of dawn, a lazy and chilly autumnal dawn, he promptly rose from his bed. His plan was made.

He gathered the rags that were left at the bottom of the cupboards, put them in his trunk, without forgetting the small gold-threaded box, bade the ancient tower of St. Germain a last good-bye, and went out, leaving everything open—door, windows, cupboards, so that nothing of their life, of the good days spent there together, might be left behind in this place where strangers would henceforth live. Downstairs he gave notice for the room, paid up the rent in arrear; and leaving the doorkeeper's insidious questions unanswered he hailed a passing cab and had

himself driven to the Hotel Pilois, Rue des Dames, in Batignolles.

This hotel was owned by a brother of old Pilois, the Marquis's cook. Rooms were let only on three-monthly terms and to persons who were recommended to the proprietor. And indeed the hotel Pilois enjoyed a special reputation in the neighbourhood. To live in the Hotel Pilois was equivalent to a certificate of good conduct and high morals. Jack had won the confidence of the d'Hacqueville household's chef and had been entrusted by him with a hamper of Marsala wine for his brother.

This reference was found satisfactory and when Jack timidly expressed the wish to become one of the residents, M. Pilois unhesitatingly gave him a beautiful ground-floor room with two windows opening upon the garden of the hotel, I was going to say of the convent. The garden was not large: three or four acacias, a square plot of hungry-looking grass—a Batignolles lawn—a fig-tree without figs, a sickly vine and a few chrysanthemum stalks were all it could boast of. But it was sufficient to brighten the room, which was somewhat damp and gloomy.

Without losing a minute's time Jack proceeded to settle down. He drove in nails, put away his linen, set up a rack for Daniel's pipes, hung Madame Eysette's portrait over the bed, did, in short, his best to dispel that commonplace atmosphere of furnished lodgings. When he had properly taken possession

of his new home, he had a bite of lunch and immediately went out. Passing M. Pilois he informed him that he might come in somewhat late that evening, by way of exception, and requested him to have a nice supper with two covers and some old wine served in his room. Instead of rejoicing at this extra order, the worthy M. Pilois turned red up to the tips of his ears, like a newly appointed curate.

"I don't quite know," he stammered in embarrassment, "the hotel rules do not permit . . . we have members of the clergy here and . . ."

Jack smiled.

"Oh, I understand . . . the two covers have frightened you. Rest assured, my dear M. Pilois, it is not a woman."

But to himself he said, as he walked towards Montparnasse: "And yet—it is a woman, a helpless woman, an unreasonable child, who must never again be left alone."

Do you know why mother Jack was so sure of finding me at Montparnasse? I might well have left the theatre since I had written that terrible letter which was not posted; I might not have joined it even. But he knew: he was guided by a mother's instinct. He was convinced that he would find me there and had resolved to take me away with him that same evening; but he reflected shrewdly: "He has to be alone, and that woman must not suspect anything, so that I may take him away." Accordingly he did not make direct inquiries at the theatre—theatre people are

loquacious and a single word might have given the alarm. He would rather refer to the handbills; and he hastened to consult them.

Handbills of suburban theatre performances are affixed to the doors of local wine shops, behind a grating, rather like the marriage proclamations in Alsatian villages. Jack read them and gave an exclamation of joy.

The Theatre Montparnasse showed that night *Marie-Jeanne*, Drama in Five Acts, with Mesdames Irma Borel, Désirée Levrault, Guifne, etc., preceded by *Love and Plums*, Vaudeville in One Act, with Messrs. Daniel, Antonin, and Mlle. Leontine.

"Good!" he thought, "they are not acting in the same play. My plan will succeed."

And he entered a café near the Luxembourg gardens, to await the hour of abduction. When evening came he went to the theatre. The show had already begun. For about an hour he strolled up and down under the porch with the municipal guards.

From time to time the noise of clapping, like the sound of a distant shower of hail reached him from within; and it wrung his heart to think that it was perhaps his child whose grimaces were being applauded. Towards nine o'clock a noisy crowd flooded the street. The Vaudeville was over; some people were still laughing. The crowd was whistling, yelling—the Parisian menagerie gave tongue in squeaks and boisterous shouts.

This was certainly not the exclusive public of the Théâtre des Italiens.

He waited for a while, lost in that clamorous mob. When at the end of the interval everybody was returning into the house, he slipped into a dark and filthy side passage—the artists' entrance—and asked for Mme. Irma Borel.

"You can't see her now," he was told, "she is on the stage."

He was a fiend for cunning, was mother Jack! He answered very calmly:

"As I cannot see Madame Irma Borel, will you please call M. Daniel: he could give her my message."

A minute later mother Jack had recovered his child and was carrying it off at great speed towards the other end of Paris.

#### XIV THE DREAM

"Look, Daniel!" said mother Jack as we entered his room in the Hotel Pilois, "it's just as it was when you first arrived in Paris."

Indeed, as on that night, an inviting supper was awaiting us, served on immaculate table linen: the pie smelt nice, the wine looked mature, the light of the candles danced brightly in the glasses . . . And yet, and yet—it was not as it had been. There are joys that do not fall twice to our lot. The supper was



the same; but the flower of the company that had sat down to it were now absent: the Enthusiasm of the day of arrival, the Plans of things to be done, the Dreams of fame, and the Sacred confidence which gives you laughter and appetite. Not one, alas, not a single one of our old table-companions had consented to come to M. Pilois' house. They all had stayed behind in the belfry of St. Germain: and at the last minute even Open-hearted Talk, who had promised us to be present, sent word that he would not come.

No, it was not as it had been then. I realized it so well that Jack's remark, instead of cheering me up, brought a flood of tears to my eyes. I am sure that at the bottom of his heart he too felt very much like crying. But he had the strength to control himself; he took me by the hand and said with an air of brisk cheerfulness:

"Come, Daniel! you have cried enough. You have done nothing else for the last hour. (While he was talking to me in the carriage I had been ceaselessly sobbing on his shoulder) A funny way of greeting your brother, I must say! You actually remind me of the worst period of my history, the time of the glue-pots and of 'Jack you are an ass!' Come on, dry your tears, young penitent, and look at yourself in the mirror: you will have a good laugh."

I looked into the mirror; but I did not laugh. I was ashamed of myself. My yellow wig was stuck to my forehead, my cheeks

were smeared with paint and powder, and sweat and tears on top of it. . . hideous! With a gesture of disgust I tore off the wig. I was about to throw it from me, but I paused, and went to hang it up in the middle of the wall.

Jack watched me, greatly astonished :

"Why do you put it there, Daniel? It isn't pretty at all—something like a Red Indian war trophy. . . It looks as if we had scalped Punch."

I replied very gravely :

"No, Jack, it is not a trophy. It is my remorse, my remorse in visible and palpable form: I want to have it always before my eyes."

The shadow of a sad smile passed over Jack's face, but he resumed his cheerful mien at once :

"Pah! don't let us talk of that. Now that you have washed the stuff from your face and I can recognize my handsome brother again, let us sit down and eat; come, curly-head! I am starving."

It was not true, 'he was not hungry—nor was I, my God! I tried in vain to do justice to the feast, the food seemed to stick in my throat, and in spite of my efforts to compose myself, I went on bathing my pie with silent tears. Jack was watching me out of the corner of his eyes and after a while he asked :

"Why do you cry? Are you sorry for having come away? Are you angry with me for having brought you here?"

I replied sadly :

"That's a bad thing to say, Jack. But I have given you the right to say anything to me."

For some time we went on eating or rather pretending to eat. At last Jack grew impatient of this show; he pushed back his plate and rose:

"The supper does not seem to be a success; we had better go to bed."

There is, in our country a proverb which says: Anguish and Sleep are not good bed-fellows. I realized it that night. My anguish sprang from the thought of all that Jack had done for me and what I had done in return, from comparing my life with his, my egoism with his unselfishness, my childish, cowardly soul with his heroic heart that had chosen the motto: "There is but one happiness in life, the happiness of others." It also made me repeat to myself: "My life is spoilt. I have lost Jack's confidence, the love of Dark Eyes, my own self-respect. What will become of me?"

These torturing thoughts kept me awake till morning. Jack did not sleep either. I heard him turning and tossing on his pillow, and coughing, with a persistent dry cough that made my eyes smart. Once I asked him very gently: "You are coughing, Jack. Are you ill?" He replied: "It is nothing. Sleep."

I understood from his look that he was angrier with me than he would admit. This thought redoubled my grief and I began to cry silently under my bedclothes, so much that in

the end I fell asleep. If anguish stands in the way of sleep, tears are a good narcotic.

When I woke up it was broad daylight. Jack was not beside me. I thought he had gone out; but as I drew the curtains apart, I perceived him lying on a sofa at the far end of the room; his face was pale, horribly pale. A dreadful thought flashed through my brain.

"Jack!" I cried, rushing to him.

He was asleep, my voice did not wake him. How strange! in sleep, his face bore an expression of sorrow and pain that I had never seen on it before, and yet it was not new to me. I was grieved to see his drawn features, his sunken cheeks, the pallor of his face, the sickly transparency of his hands— but my grief was one I had felt before.

Yet Jack had never been ill. He had never before had that bluish shadow under his eyes, that gaunt face. . . . In what past life had I then the vision of these details? Suddenly my dream came back to me. Yes! there it was— this was the Jack of my dream: pale, horribly pale, stretched out on a sofa, dead. . . . Jack is dead, Daniel Eysette, and it is you who have killed him.

At this moment a grey beam of sunlight crept timidly through the window and flitted like a lizard over the pale lifeless face. Oh, sweet relief! The dead man wakes up, rubs his eyes, sees me standing before him, and says with a cheerful smile:

"Good morning, Daniel! Did you sleep well? I was coughing too much—I did not

want to disturb you, so I came to lie down here."

And while he talks to me quite calmly, I feel my legs still trembling with the horrible vision I have had; and in the secret depth of my heart I pray:

"Almighty God, guard and preserve my mother Jack!"

In spite of this sad awakening we spent a rather cheerful morning. We were even able to find an echo of our old laughter when I started to dress and found that I had nothing but a pair of short fustian breeches and a red waistcoat with large flaps, part of the theatrical garb I was wearing at the time of my abduction.

"You see, my boy," said Jack, "one can't think of everything. Only a very indelicate Don Juan would think of the trousseau when about to carry off a lovely lady. Have no fear, we shall get you a new outfit. That too will be as it was when you arrived in Paris."

He said this only to please me: for he felt as distinctly as I did that things were very different now.

"Come, Daniel," my good Jack continued, seeing that I was again growing pensive, "let us forget the past. A new life is beginning for us: let us enter upon it without remorse, without distrust, and only take care that it does not play us the same tricks as the old one did. I shall not ask you what you intend to do: but if you wish to attempt another poem, it seems to me that this place would be good to work

in. The room is quiet. There are birds singing in the garden. You can put your workbench in front of the window."

I interrupted him sharply :

"No, Jack! no more poetry, no more rhymes—those are fancies which cost you too much. Now I want to do as you do: work, earn my bread and help you with all my strength to rebuild our home."

And he replied smiling and calm :

"Nice plans, my Blue Butterfly, but that's not what you are asked to do. Whether you will earn your bread is not the question; if you would only promise . . . no! we shall talk of this at some other time. Let us go out and buy your clothes."

In order to go out I had to don one of his frock coats, which came down to my heels and made me look like a Piedmontese musician: I needed only a harp. Had I been forced to show myself in the streets thus attired a few months ago, I should have died of shame; but as things were now I had other reasons for shame. No matter how the women's eyes smiled as I passed by—things were no longer as they had been at the time of my galoshes. Oh no, things were no longer the same. . . .

"Now that you look like a human being," said mother Jack when we came out from the old-clothes dealer's, "I shall take you back to the hotel Pilois; then I am going to see whether ironmonger for whom I kept books before my departure will again give me some work.

Pierrotte's money will not last for ever : I must start to look out for our bread-and-butter."

I had a mind to tell him :

" Very well, Jack, go to your ironmonger's. I am quite able to return home alone." But I understood him. He wanted to make sure that I did not go to Montparnasse again. Ah! could he have read into my soul. . . . I allowed him to accompany me as far as the hotel, so as to set his mind at rest; but hardly had he turned his back when I took to my heels, down the street. I too had my errands. . . .

It was late when I returned home. A large dark shadow was restlessly moving about in the misty garden. It was my mother Jack. He was shivering with cold.

" You have arrived in the nick of time," he told me, " I was about to go to Montparnasse."

Suddenly I felt very angry.

" You are too suspicious, Jack : you ought to be more generous. . . . Will things never change between us? Will you never trust me again? I swear by what I hold dearest on earth that I am not coming whence you think, that for me that woman is dead, that I shall never see her again, that you have got me back, the whole of me, and that the frightful past from which your affection rescued me has left me only remorse and no regret. What else can I say to convince you? Oh, you are heartless! I wish I could open my breast and show you that I am not lying! "

I do not remember what answer he gave

me; but he shook his head sadly in the darkness, as though he wanted to say: "I should like to believe you, but...."

And yet I had spoken sincerely. No doubt that alone I should never have had the strength to free myself from that woman; but now that my fetters were broken I felt unspeakably relieved. Like one who tries to kill himself with coal gas and would change his mind at the last minute, when it is too late and he is already choked and paralyzed with the suffocating fumes when suddenly the neighbours arrive, the door bursts open, life-giving air circulates through the room and the poor suicide breathes it in delightful draughts, glad to be alive and promising never to do such a thing again, I, after five months of moral suffocation, now greedily inhaled the pure and strong air of honest life, filling my lungs with it, and I swear by God that I had no mind to commit the old folly again. That was what Jack would not believe and no solemn oath could convince him of my sincerity. Poor boy! I had sinned so much against him!

We spent the first evening at home, sitting by the fire, as if it had been winter. The room was damp and the mist from the garden chilled us to the bone. And then, you know how it is: when you are sad it seems to do you good if you have a fire to look at.... Jack was working, making calculations. In his absence the ironmonger had tried to keep his own accounts and the result was a glorious



muddle, a messing-up of Credit and Debit that would take months to put right. I should have been only too glad to help my mother Jack in this operation. But blue butterflies are not good at arithmetic; and after spending an hour over the big red-ruled ledger-books full of queer hieroglyphs I had to throw my pen away.

Jack however was wonderful at this unattractive task. He charged headlong into the densest throng of figures, the most imposing columns did not scare him. From time to time he would interrupt his work to turn to me and ask, a little anxiously:

"We are comfortable here: are we not? You are not bored, I hope?"

I was not bored but I felt sorry to see him work so hard and thought with bitter self-reproach: "Why am I alive? . . . I am good only at tormenting people and bringing tears to the eyes that love me. . . ." This thought brought Dark Eyes to my mind and I gazed sadly at the small gold-threaded box that Jack had placed—perhaps on purpose—on the square top of the clock. How many memories that box called to my mind! How eloquently it spoke to me from the height of its bronze pedestal! "Dark Eyes had given you her heart; what have you done with it?" it asked me. "You have thrown it away for wild beasts to prey upon and White Cuckoo has devoured it."

This long melancholy evening spent by the

fire, working and musing, depicts well the new life we were henceforth to live. All the days which followed resembled this evening. It was of course not Jack who was given to musing. He sat for hours and hours over his big books, buried up to the neck in the mess of figures, while I would stir the fire with the poker; I would say to the small gold-threaded box: "Let us talk of Dark Eyes, will you?" You see, it was impossible to talk of her to Jack. For some reason or other he carefully avoided any mention of this topic. Not even a word about Pierrotte—nothing. So I took my revenge with the little box and our talks were endlessly long. Toward midday, when I saw my mother Jack completely absorbed in his books, I would creep noiselessly to the door and slip out, saying:

"I'll be soon back, Jack."

He never asked me where I went: but I saw from his unhappy look and his anxious query: "You are going out?" that he did not trust me overmuch. He was still haunted by the fear of that woman. He thought: "If he sees her again we are lost."

Who knows? Perhaps he was right. May be, if I had met that enchantress, I should again have fallen under the spell of her golden tresses and the white mark in the corner of her mouth. But I did not meet her, thank God! Some Mr. Eight-to-Ten had no doubt made her forget her Dani-Dan, and never again did I hear from her or her negress.

One evening, returning from one of my

mysterious excursions, I entered the room with a shout of joy :

" Jack! Jack! there is good news. I have found work. I have been wearing out my soles for ten days, without telling you about it, looking for a job. . . . At last I have succeeded, I have found one. From to-morrow I am Superintendent at the Ouly Institute, at Montmartre, quite nearby. I shall be there from seven o'clock in the morning to seven in the evening—it's a long time to be away from you, but at least I shall earn my living and be able to help you a little."

Jack lifted his head from his figures and replied rather coldly :

" My world! It's good that you come to my assistance, my boy. The household would be too heavy a burden for me alone. . . . I do not know what is wrong with me, but for some time I have been feeling quite worn out."

A violent fit of coughing obliged him to stop. He dropped his pen with a dejected look and went and flung himself upon the sofa. At the sight of him lying there stretched out, pale, horribly pale, the terrible vision rose again before my eyes; but it vanished in a flash. Almost at once Jack rose again and laughed at my distracted countenance :

" It's nothing, silly! I am just a little tired. . . . I have worked too much these days. Now that you have found a post I shall take it easy and in a week I shall be well again."

He said this so simply and looked so cheerful that my gloomy, forebodings flew

away; and for a full month I did not hear the flapping of their dark wings....

Next day I started work in the Ouly Institute.

In spite of its high-sounding name the Ouly Institute was a ridiculous little school, conducted by an old ringleted lady, whom the children called "Darling". There were some twenty little fellows, very small fellows indeed—those who come to school with their lunch packed up in a basket and always have a bit of shirt peeping out somewhere.

Such were our pupils. Madame Ouly taught them hymns; I initiated them into the mysteries of the alphabet. Further, I had the task of watching them during recreation, in a courtyard—there were some hens and a turkey cock of whom my pupils were greatly afraid.

At times, when "Darling" had her attack of gout, I also swept the classroom—a task hardly befitting a Superintendent, but I did it nevertheless without disgust, so happy was I to earn my living. In the evening, when I returned to the Hotel Pilois I found dinner ready and mother Jack waiting for me. After dinner, a few quick turns in the garden, and then the long evening by the fire. This was our whole life. From time to time a letter would come from Monsieur or Madame Eysette—Those were our great events. Madame Eysette was still staying with uncle Baptiste; M. Eysette was still travelling on behalf of the Wine Growers' Association. The news was not too bad. The Lyons debts were nearly paid, in

a year or two everything would be settled and it might be possible to re-unite the family.

In the meantime I should have liked Mme. Eysette to come and stay with us at the Hotel Pilois, but Jack would not hear of it.

"No, not yet," he would say, with a peculiar look. "Not yet . . . let us wait." And this answer, always the same, hurt me. I thought: "He mistrusts me. He fears lest I commit again some folly, while Mme. Eysette is here. That is why he wants to wait."

I was wrong. This was not the reason which made Jack say: "Let us wait."

## XV *THE DREAM COMES TRUE*

READER, if you are a freethinker, if dreams make you smile, if your heart has never been stung—so sharply stung as to make you cry out in pain—by the presentiment of future things; if you are of a matter-of-fact mind, one of those hard-headed people whom only facts impress and who do not allow a grain of superstition to linger in their minds; if you absolutely refuse to believe in the supernatural and to admit that which cannot be explained—do not read these memoirs to the end. What I have to say in these last chapters is as true as Eternal Truth itself; but you will not believe it.

It was on the fourth of December. . .

I was returning from the Ouly Institute even more hurriedly than usual. In the morning I had left Jack at home, complaining of a great fatigue, and I was anxious to have his news. Crossing the garden I ran into M. Pilois who was standing under the fig-tree talking in a low voice to a stout and short individual with remarkably large hands, who seemed to have great difficulty in buttoning his gloves.

I was about to apologize and pass on, but the hotel proprietor detained me: "Just a minute, M. Daniel!"

Then he turned to his companion and added:

"This is the young man in question. I think you had better let him know. . ."

I stopped, greatly puzzled. What had this stout gentleman to tell me? That his gloves were much too tight for his paws? I could see that for myself, by Jove!

There was a moment of silence and embarrassment. M. Pilois turned his face upwards, gazing into the fig tree as though looking for the figs that were not there.

The man with the gloves was still plucking at his buttonholes. At last, however, he spoke; but he did not let go of that button, no fear.

"Monsieur," he addressed me, "I have been physician to the hotel Pilois for twenty years and I daresay. . ."

I did not let him complete the sentence. The word physician told me everything.

"Have you come to see my brother?" I asked trembling. "He is very ill, is he not?"

I do not believe this doctor was a heartless man, but just then he was above all worried about his gloves; he did not consider that he was speaking to Jack's child, he did not attempt to soften the blow. . . He replied brutally :

"Ill! I should say he is ill. He will not last through the night."

The blow went home, I assure you. House, garden, M. Pilois, the doctor—all started whirling round me. I had to support myself against the fig-tree. The physician of the Hotel Pilois had a heavy hand. . . However, he did not notice anything and continued with the greatest composure, still buttoning his gloves :

"It is an acute case of rapid consumption, past recovery. There is nothing we can do, or at least nothing of any avail. Besides, I have been called in much too late, as usual."

"Not through my fault, doctor," said the worthy M. Pilois, who persisted in searching for figs with great concentration—as good a way as any other for hiding his tears—"it was not my fault. I knew since long that poor M. Eysette was ill, and I have often advised him to call in someone; but he would not listen. Evidently he did not want to frighten his brother. You see, they were so fond of each other, these two boys. . ."

An irrepressible sob burst from the very depths of my heart.

"Now, now, my boys, courage!" said the man with the gloves, assuming an air of kindness. "Who knows? Science has pronounced the last word, but Nature has not yet. . . I shall come again to-morrow morning."

Thereupon he turned smartly round on his toes, and went away, sighing with satisfaction: he had managed to button one glove!

I remained outside for a short while, in order to dry my tears and compose myself; then I summoned my whole courage and resolutely entered our room.

What I saw on opening the door terrified me.

Jack had had a mattress placed on the sofa—so as to leave me the bed, no doubt—and I found him lying there, pale, horribly pale, exactly like in my dream.

My first impulse was to rush to him, and carry him in my arms to his bed, carry him anywhere, to get him away from there, oh God, get him away from there. . . But at once the thought flashed through my mind: "You cannot carry him, he is too big." Then, having seen my mother Jack lying there—lying there without hope on the spot where the dream had told me he would die, my courage failed and the mask of forced cheerfulness that we wear in order to reassure the dying, dropped from my face and I fell on my knees beside the sofa, in a flood of tears.

Painfully, Jack turned towards me:

"It's you, Daniel. . . You have met the doctor, have you not? And I had asked the



silly fellow not to frighten you. But I can see that he has not done as he was told, and that you know everything. Give me your hand, my little brother . . . who would have imagined such infernal luck? People go to Nice to get cured of their consumption; I went there to catch it . . . quite an original thing. You know, if you get so distressed you will deprive me of my whole courage; I am not too brave as it is. This morning, after you had left, I realized that things were looking bad. I sent for the Cure of St. Pierre and he came to see me. He will return presently and bring me the Sacraments. Our mother will be pleased, you understand. He is a nice fellow, this Curé. He has the same name as your friend at Sarlande College."

He could not speak any more and fell back on his pillow, closing his eyes. I thought he was dying and cried out :

"Jack! Jack! my brother!"

He did not speak, but he moved his hand repeatedly, as if to say :

"Hush! hush!"

At this moment the door opened. M. Pilois came into the room, followed by a stout man who rolled like a ball towards the sofa, crying :

"What is that I hear, Master Jack? I may well say so . . ."

"Good evening, Pierrotte," said Jack, reopening his eyes, "good evening, old friend! I was quite sure you would come at the first

call. Let him sit here, Daniel; I must talk to him."

Pierrotte bent his big head to the dying boy's pale lips, and they remained thus for a long time, speaking in whispers. I looked at them, standing motionless in the middle of the room. I still held my books under my arm. M. Pilois took them gently from me and said something that I did not hear; then he lit the candles and placed a large white napkin on the table. I said to myself: why does he lay the table, are we going to dine? . . . but I am not hungry."

Night was coming. Outside, in the garden, the people of the hotel were making signs to one another, looking at our windows. Jack and Pierrotte were still talking. From time to time I heard Pierrotte say in his deep voice, now full of grief:

"Yes, Master Jack . . . Yes, Master Jack."

But I dared not draw nearer . . . At last however Jack called me and made me sit by his bed, beside Pierrotte.

"Daniel, my dearest," he said after a long pause, "it grieves me to have to leave you; but there is one thing to comfort me; I do not leave you alone in the world. Pierrotte will remain with you, our good Pierrotte, who forgives you and promises to take my place by your side."

"Oh yes, Master Jack, I promise. . . I may well say so: I promise."

"You see my poor boy," continued mother Jack, "you will never succeed in rebuilding

our home all by yourself. I do not want to hurt you—but you are a bad builder of homes. Still, I believe that with Pierrotte's help you will be able to realize our dream. I shall not ask you to try and be a man; like Abbé Germane, I also think that you will be a child all your life. But I implore you to be always a good child, a courageous child, and above all—come nearer, I want to say it in your ear—and above all, not to make Dark Eyes weep."

Here my dear brother paused again for rest, then he resumed: "When it will be over you will write to Dad and Mummy. But you will have to tell them by bits, to hear it all at once would hurt them too much. Do you understand now why I would not let Mme. Eysette come? I did not want her to be here for occasions like these are too painful for mothers."

He broke off and looked towards the door.

"Here is Our Lord!" he said, smiling.

And he made signs to us to stand aside.

It was the priest bringing Viaticum. The Host and the holy oils were placed upon the white tablecloth between the candles. Then the priest went up to the bed and the ceremony began.

When it was over—and how long it seemed to me!—when it was over, Jack called me softly to him.

"Give me a kiss" he said.

His voice was so weak that it seemed as though he were talking to me from very far. . . And indeed, he must have moved far away—

the terrible malady had overthrown him nearly twelve hours ago and was carrying him off towards death at double speed.

As I bent to embrace him, my hand met his, his beloved hand damp with the sweat of death; I seized it and stayed thus, I do not know for how long—perhaps an hour, perhaps an eternity, I cannot tell. He no longer saw me, nor spoke to me. But again and again his hand wove in mine, as though to say: “I feel that you are there.” Suddenly a long tremor shook his poor body from head to foot. His eyes opened and stared around, looking for someone: and as I bent over him I heard him repeat very softly:

“Jack you are an ass... Jack, you are an ass.”

Then nothing... he was dead.

Oh, my dream!

There was a strong wind that night. December hurled handfuls of sleet against the window panes. On the table at the far end of the room a silver crucifix shone between two candles. Kneeling before the crucifix a strange priest was praying aloud, through the wailing of the wind. I did not pray; nor did I weep. I had but one thought; one fixed thought: to bring warmth back into the beloved hand that I held tightly clasped between my own. Alas! as morning drew nearer, that hand grew more and more heavy and ice cold.

Suddenly the priest who was reciting

Latin prayers before the crucifix, rose, and approaching me, tapped me on the shoulder :

"Try to pray," he said, "it will do you good."

Only then did I recognize him. It was my old friend of Sarlande College, Abbé Germane himself, with his beautiful disfigured face and his bearing of a dragoon dressed in a cassock. I was so utterly stunned by grief that I felt no surprise at seeing him. It seemed quite natural that he should be there . . . But this is how it had come to pass :

When little Thingummy was about to leave the college Abbé Germane had said to him :

"I have a brother in Paris, a good fellow and a priest . . . but never mind ! It's no use giving you his address—I am sure you would not go to see him."

Now see the ways of Destiny ! The Abbé's brother was the parish priest of St. Pierre in Montmartre, and it was he whom poor Jack had called to his death bed. Just then Abbé Germane happened to pass through Paris and was staying at the presbytery . . . On the evening of December 4, his brother said to him on returning home :

"I have taken the Sacraments to an unfortunate boy who is dying in our neighbourhood. You must pray for him, Abbé !"

The Abbé replied : "I shall remember him to-morrow in my Mass. What is his name ?"

"Wait a minute . . . it's a Southern name,

rather difficult to remember . . . Yes, that's it : Eysette, Jack Eysette."

This name reminded the Abbé of a certain little usher of his acquaintance; he lost no time and hastened to the Hotel Pilois. When he came in he saw me standing by the bed, clinging to Jack's hand. He would not disturb me in my grief and sent the others away, telling them that he would sit up with me; then he knelt down, and it was only at a late hour of the night that he tapped me on the shoulder, alarmed by my immobility, and made himself known.

I have no clear knowledge of what happened after that. The end of the terrible night, the day which came after it, and many more days that followed have left me but dim and confused recollections. There is a large gap in my memory . . . Still, I remember—but as though it had happened centuries ago—a long, interminable walk through the muddy streets of Paris, behind a black carriage. I can see myself walking barehead between Pierrotte and Father Germane. A cold sleety rain lashes our faces. Pierrotte carries a large umbrella, but he holds it so awkwardly and it is raining so hard that the Abbé's cassock is streaming wet and glistens. It is raining, it is raining very hard. . .

A tall gentleman dressed in black is walking by the side of the carriage; he carries an ebony staff. He is the Master of Ceremonies, —a kind of Lord Chamberlain of death. Like any other Lord Chamberlain, he wears a silk

mantle, a sword, short breeches and an opera hat . . . It is a hallucination? I find that this man resembles M. Viot, the college Superintendent at Sarlande. He is lean like him and also holds his head bent towards one shoulder, and whenever he looks at me he has the same false and cold smile that used to be on the terrible turnkey's lips. It is not M. Viot, but it is perhaps his shadow.

The black carriage proceeds slowly, so very slowly, that it seems we should never reach our goal . . . At last we are in a dismal garden in which we wade ankledeep through yellowish mud and stop on the brink of a large hole. Men in short coats are bringing a large box which is very heavy and must be lowered into the hole. It is a difficult operation. The ropes are wet and yet stuck and will not slip. I hear one of the men shouting: "The feet first! feet first!"

Facing me, on the opposite side of the hole, M. Viot's shadow gently continues to smile at me, his head drooping on his shoulder. He stands outlined against the grey sky, long and lean in his tight-fitting garb of mourning, like a big black dripping wet grasshopper . . .

Now I am alone with Pierrotte. We are walking through the Faubourg Montmartre. Pierrotte is looking for a cab, but he cannot find one. I walk by his side, holding my hat in my hand; I think that I am still following the horse. All through the streets of the Faubourg, people turn round to look at the stout man who is weeping while he calls out

to cabs and at the boy who walks barehead under a pelting rain . . .

We are walking, we are still walking. I am tired, my head is heavy . . . At last we reach the Passage du Saumon and the former Lalouette establishment with its painted shutters, streaming with green water. We do not enter the shop, but go straight upstairs to Pierrotte's flat. On climbing the first floor my strength fails. I sit down on the steps; I cannot go further—my head is too heavy . . . Now Pierrotte takes me in his arms; while he carries me upstairs, half dead and shaking with fever, I hear the sleet pattering against the shop windows and the water from the spouts noisily gushing into the courtyard . . . It is raining . . . it is raining very hard!

## XVI THE END OF THE DREAM

LITTLE THINGUMMY is ill: little Thingummy is going to die . . . There is a large litter of straw on the pavement in front of the Passage, it is renewed every other day; and the passers-by say:

“Some rich old man is dying up there.”

It is not a rich old man who is dying, it is little Thingummy . . . All the doctors have given him up. Two attacks of typhoid fever within two years are far too much for this



small humming-bird. Go ahead then! harness the horses to the black carriage! Let the big grasshopper be ready with his ebony staff and his affected smile! Little Thingummy is ill, little Thingummy is going to die.

There is great consternation in the former Lalouette establishment. Pierrotte spends sleepless nights; Dark Eyes is in despair. The lady of great merit is frantically searching her booklet of Household Remedies and implores the blessed Saint Camphor to work another miracle to save the poor dear boy. The yellow drawing-room is deserted, the piano dead, the flute nailed up. But the most distressful to see, by far the most distressful, is a slight figure in a black dress, who sits in a corner knitting from morning till night and shedding big silent tears.

While the Lalouette establishment is thus plunged in grief day and night, little Thingummy is very quietly lying in a large featherbed, quite unaware of the tears that are being shed for him. His eyes are open but he cannot see anything: the objects do not penetrate to his mind. Nor does he hear anything except a hollow humming noise, a vague rumble, as though he had two sea shells for ears—two of those large rose-lipped shells in which you hear the rumble of the waves. He does not speak, he does not think: he lies there like a withered flower. All he asks for is that a cloth dipped in cold water be placed on his head and a bit of ice in his mouth. When the ice has melted in his mouth when

the cloth has dried on his burning skull, he utters a groan: that is his entire conversation.

Thus several days pass—days which have no hours, vague days of confusion; then, suddenly, one morning little Thingummy has a peculiar sensation. It seems to him that he has been lifted from the bottom of the sea. His eyes can see, his ears can hear; he is breathing, he is gaining a foothold. The thinking machine with its intricate wheels, as delicate as a fairy's hair, had been lying asleep in some corner of his brain; now it wakes up and starts to work, slowly at first, then a little faster, then at a crazy speed—tick! tick! tick!—as though it would snap. One feels that this fine machine is not meant to lie asleep and that it wants to make up for lost time... Tick! tick! tick... the thoughts run criss-cross, get entangled, like so many silken threads:

“Where am I, my God?... why this large bed? And what are those three ladies doing near the window?... Who is that in the little black dress, turning her back to me? I seem to know her... do I not?... ”

And so that he may have a better view of the little black dress that he seems to recognise, little Thingummy painfully raises himself on his elbow and leans forward: but at once he flings himself back, appalled. Facing him, in the middle of the room, he perceives a walnut-wood clothes-press with iron purfling on the front panels. He knows this clothes-press: he has seen it in a dream, in an awful

dream... ' Tick! tick! tick. The thinking machine spins and whirls... Oh! little Thingummy remembers now. The Hotel Pilois, Jack's death, the funeral, the arrival at Pierrotte's in the pelting rain, he remembers everything, he knows everything. Alas! his return to life is a return to grief; and his first utterance is a groan.

The three women who are working by the window start as they hear his groan. One of them,—the youngest,—rises, crying:

"Some ice! some ice!"

And quickly she runs to the mantelpiece to fetch a piece of ice which she offers to little Thingummy; but little Thingummy does not want it and gently, he pushes away the hand that fumbles for his mouth; a very delicate hand for a nurse! However, he says, in a trembling voice:

"Good morning, Camille!"

Camille Pierrotte is so surprised to hear the dying patient speak that she remains standing there dumbfounded, her arm outstretched, and the transparent cube of ice trembling between her fingers that are pink with cold.

"Good morning, Camille!" little Thingummy repeats, "You see, I recognize you perfectly... I am quite myself now... And you? can you see me properly?"

Camille Pierrotte opens her eyes wide:

"What do you mean, Daniel? of course I can see you!"

The thought that the clothes-press is not

real, that Camille Pierrotte is not blind, that the dream, the awful dream, cannot be true to the end, gives little Thingummy courage and he ventures to ask some more questions:

"I have been very ill, have I not, Camille?"

"Oh yes, Daniel, you have been very ill."

"Have I been in bed for a long time?"

"It will be three weeks tomorrow . . ."

"Mercy! three weeks! . . . Already three weeks since my poor mother Jack . . ."

He does not complete the sentence and hides his face in the pillow, sobbing; at this moment Pierrotte enters the room, bringing with him another physician. (If the illness should last a little longer the whole Academy of Medicines would be called in). This one is the famous Doctor "Brum-Brum", an energetic gentleman who gets down to business at once and does not waste his time over his gloves at the patients' bedside. He bends down to little Thingummy, feels his pulse, looks at his eyes and his tongue, and then turns to Pierrotte:

"You have been telling me stories! This boy is cured!"

"Cured?" says the worthy Pierrotte, clasping his hands.

"So much so that you are at once to throw that ice out of the window and give your patient a wing of chicken with a sprinkling of wine. Now little lady! don't distress yourself any more; I give you my word that this young cheat will be on his feet in eight days. In the meantime, let him lie quietly in his bed

and avoid all shocks and excitements, that is the main thing. We can leave the rest to Nature; she knows more about the art of healing than you and I."

Having thus spoken, the famous Dr. "Brum-Brum" flicks his finger at the young cheat's nose, smiles at Mlle. Camille, and walks briskly out, escorted by the worthy Pierrotte who is crying for joy and repeating all the time:

"Oh! doctor.... I may well say so... I may well say so..."

When they have gone Camille bids the patient sleep; but he vehemently refuses to do so:

"Camille, please, do not go away... Do not leave me alone... How can I sleep with so much sorrow in my heart?"

"But you must, Daniel, you must sleep. You need rest, the doctor has said so. Come, be reasonable: close your eyes and stop thinking. I shall come back in a little while and if you have slept I shall stay with you for a long time."

"I am sleeping... I am sleeping..." says little Thingummy, closing his eyes.

Then he remembers something:

"Only one more word, Camille!... Who was that in the little black dress I saw here a short while ago?"

"A black dress?"

"Yes! you know—the little black dress that was working with you by the window.

She is not there now, but I did see her, I am sure I saw her!"

"Oh, no, Daniel, you must have made a mistake. I have been working here the whole morning with Mme. Tribou—your old friend Mme. Tribou, you know—you used to call her the lady of great merit... But Mme. Tribou is not dressed in black, she is wearing her old green frock... No, I assure you, there is no black dress in the house. You must have been dreaming... But I have to go now—sleep well."

And Camille Pierrotte quickly runs away; she is quite confused and her cheeks are burning, as though she had been telling lies.

Little Thingummy is left alone; but for all that he does not sleep. The machine with the delicate wheels is playing the devil with his brain. The silken threads move, run criss-cross, get entangled... He thinks of the beloved one who lies under the grass of Montmartre; he thinks also of Dark Eyes, those beautiful dark lights Providence seemed to have lit on purpose for him, and who now...

Here the door opens softly, very softly, as if somebody wanted to come in; but at once Camille Pierrotte's voice is heard to whisper:

"Do not go in! If he should wake up the shock might kill him."

And now the door closes again, softly, very softly, as it had opened. Unfortunately a fold of a black dress is caught in the door; and from his bed little Thingummy notices that black skirt.

His heart gives a sudden leap, his eyes light up, and he cries very loudly, raising himself on his elbow:

"Mother! Mother! why don't you come to me?"

The door opens immediately. The little black dress—which cannot hold out any longer—hurries into the room; but instead of going towards the bed she walks in the opposite direction, with open arms, calling: "Daniel! Daniel!"

"I am here, mother!" cries little Thingummy stretching out his arms and laughing, "I am here; do you not see me?"

And Madame Eysette, half-turning towards the bed and groping in the air with shaking hands, answers in a heart-rending voice:

"Alas! no, my dear heart, I do not see you... I shall never see you again. I am blind."

Hearing these words little Thingummy utters a loud cry and falls back on his pillow.

It was certainly nothing very extraordinary that after twenty years of suffering with the death of two children, with her home broken up and her husband far from her, the poor mother's beautiful eyes should be burnt out by tears. But for little Thingummy—what a strange coincidence with his dream! Destiny had such a terrible blow in store for him. Will he die of this shock?

Well, no! little Thingummy will not die. With him gone, what should become of the

poor blind mother? Where should she find tears to mourn for this third child? What should become of Father Eysette, that victim of commercial greed, that Wandering Jew of viniculture, who has not even had the time to come and embrace his sick child or to bring a flower to the dead one? Who should rebuild the home, build that hearth at which the two old people could one day warm their poor frozen hands? No no! little Thingummy does not want to die. On the contrary, he clings to life with all his might. He has been told that he must not think so as to recover quickly, and so he does not think; that he must not talk, so he does not talk; that he must not weep, and he does not weep . . . It is a pleasure to see him lying peacefully in his bed, with open eyes, playing with the tassels on the eiderdown quilt, as calm and comfortable as a convalescent Canon.

Around him the Lalouette establishment is all eager and silent attention to him. Mme. Eysette spends the whole day at the foot of his bed, with her knitting; the blind woman is so used to the long needles that she can knit as well as she used to when she had her sight. The lady of great merit is also there; and every now and then Pierrotte's kindly face shows itself in at the door. Even the flute-player comes upstairs four or five times in the course of the day, to hear the news. It must be mentioned, however, that this gentleman does not come to see the patient; it is rather the lady of great merit who attracts him.



Since Camille has formally declared to him that she cares neither for him nor for his flute, the impetuous musician has fallen back upon the widow Tribou, who is although less rich and less pretty than Mlle. Pierrotte—not entirely bereft of charms or of savings. With this romantic matron the fluteplayer has not wasted his time: as early as the third session marriage was in the air, and mention was vaguely made of setting up a herbalist's shop in Rue des Lombards, with the lady's savings. The young virtuoso would not like these fine projects to be forgotten—hence his frequent visits and enquiries.

And Mademoiselle Pierrotte? No word about her? Is she no longer in the house? Oh yes, she is there: but since the patient is out of danger she hardly ever comes to his room. When she does come, it is only a brief visit, to fetch the blind lady and take her to the table; but for little Thingummy she has never a word. Oh! how long ago was the days of the red rose, the time when the dark eyes opened to him like two velvet flowers and said: "I love you! . ." Lying in his bed the patient sighs as he thinks of those vanished days of happiness. He can see well that she loves him no longer, that she avoids him, shrinks from him in disgust—but it was he who would have it so. He has no right to complain. And yet, it would have been so good to have a little affection to warm your heart in the midst of so much sadness and mourning; it would have been so nice to be

able to cry on a friendly shoulder. "It can't be helped, the mischief is done," the poor boy thinks, "stop musing over it; no more idle dreaming? My happiness does not matter any more; what matters now is my duty. Tomorrow I will speak to Pierrotte."

In fact, next morning, when Pierrotte creeps cautiously through the room on his way downstairs to the shop, little Thingummy, who has been lying in wait for him inside his bed curtains since dawn, calls him softly:

"M. Pierrotte, M. Pierrotte!"

Pierrotte comes close to the bed; and the patient says, very much moved and with his eyes cast downwards.

"I am well on the way to recovery now, my dear M. Pierrotte, and I must have a serious talk with you. I shall not attempt to thank you for all that you are doing for my mother and me...."

There is a quick interruption on the part of Pierrotte:

"Not a word about this, Master Daniel! Whatever I am doing is only what I have to do. It was agreed upon by Master Jack..."

"Yes, I know, Pierrotte: I know that you give always this same answer whenever one wants to say anything on this topic.... Nor do I want to talk to you of this. On the contrary, I have called you in order to ask for a favour. Your clerk is going to leave you soon: will you take me in his place? Please, Pierrotte, listen to me—do not refuse before you have heard me. I know that I have no

longer the right to live near you, after my vile conduct. There is someone in the house whom my presence offends, someone to whom the sight of me is odious, and it is only right that it should be so. But if I promise never to come up here, if I never show myself, if I stay always in the shop, and stay in your house without belonging to it, like the big dogs that live in the backyard and never enter the living rooms—could you not accept me on these conditions?"

Pierrotte has a mind to take little Thingummy's curly head in his large hands and give him a big kiss, but he refrains and answers calmly:

"Well now, Master Daniel, I must consult the little girl before I can say anything. As for me, your proposal suits me very well, but I don't know whether the little girl... But we can make sure at once. She must have got up by now. Camille! Camille!"

Camille Pierrotte, who rises as early as a bee, is watering her red rose-tree on the drawing room mantelpiece. She comes, in her morning gown, with her hair tucked up in a Chinese knot looking fresh and cheerful and smelling of flowers.

"Look here, little girl," says Pierrotte, "M. Daniel here wants me to engage him as our new clerk... Only as he thinks that his presence here would be too painful for you..."

"Too painful!" interrupts Camille Pierrotte, changing colour.

She says no more; but the dark eyes com-

plete the sentence. Yes! the dark eyes appear before little Thingummy, deep as the night, luminous as the stars, and cry "Love! love!" with so much feeling and fire that the poor sick boy's heart is set ablaze.

Pierrotte is laughing in his sleeve.

"I say! clear up this matter, you two; there seems to be some misunderstanding here..."

And he goes to the window, where he drums a Cévennes dance tune on the glass. When he thinks that the children have cleared up the matter sufficiently—my God! they have hardly had time to exchange two words!—he turns round and looks at them:

"Well?"

"Oh, Pierrotte!" says little Thingummy, stretching out his hands to him, "she is as good as yourself. She has forgiven me."

From this moment on the convalescent progresses with gigantic strides. Naturally, because Dark Eyes is hardly ever out of his room. The days are spent in planning the future. They talk of marriage, of the home to be rebuilt; they also talk of dear mother Jack and his name still brings many tears to their eyes. But it does not matter—in spite of everything there is Love in the Lafouette establishment. You can feel it everywhere. And should anybody wonder at love blossoming thus amidst sorrow and tears, I shall tell him to go to the cemeteries and see all those pretty little flowers that grow between the tombstones.

But you should not think that Little Thingummy's love makes him forget his duty. However comfortable he may be in his large bed, between Mme. Eysette and Dark Eyes, he is impatient to recover his strength, to get up and go down to the shop. Certainly not because chinaware tempts him so strongly; but he is anxious to commence a life of work and self-denial, following the example set him by mother Jack. It is, after all, still better to sell plates in a lane, as Irma the tragedienne used to say, than to sweep the Ouly Institute or get yourself whistled and hissed at in the Montparnasse theatre. As to the Muse, she is forgotten. Daniel Eysette is still fond of poetry, but not of his own; and when the printer, having grown weary of the nine-hundred and ninety-nine volumes of the *Pastoral Comedy*, sends them to the Passage du Saumon, the unlucky ex-poet says courageously: "We must burn this rubbish."

To this Pierrotte, who is more practical, replies:

"Burn it! certainly not. I would rather keep it in the shop. I'll make use of it somehow . . . I may well say so . . . Just now there are those egg-cups to be sent to Madagascar. It seems that the people there have seen the wife of an English missionary eating boiled eggs, and now nobody wants to eat eggs without cups. With your permission, Master Daniel, we shall use your books for wrapping the egg-cups."

Indeed, a fortnight later the *Pastoral*

*Comedy* sets forth on its journey to the country of the illustrious Rana-Volo.<sup>1</sup> May it have more success there than it had in Paris!

... And now, dear reader, before I conclude my story I shall once more introduce you into the yellow drawing-room. It is Sunday afternoon—a glorious winter Sunday, cold and bright. The Lalouette establishment is full of rejoicing. Little Thingummy's health is completely restored, this is his first time out of bed. In honour of this happy event a few dozens of oysters have been sacrificed to Aesculapius in the morning, and these have been washed down with a jolly white wine from Touraine. Now the household is gathered in the drawing-room. It is very cosy there; the fire is blazing in the fireplace. The sun draws silvery landscapes in the white frost covering the windowpanes.

The poor blind lady is dozing by the fireplace: at her feet, sitting on a low footstool, little Thingummy is talking in whispers with Mademoiselle Camille, who is redder than the little red rose in her hair. Quite naturally—she being so close to the fire! . . . From time to time there is a little noise as of a mouse nibbling at something—that is the bird's head pecking at his sugar in a corner; or else a distressed cry—that is the lady of great merit losing the money for the herbalist's shop at

<sup>1</sup> Then Queen of Madagascar.—*Tr.*

bézique. I beg you to note the triumphant look of Madame Lalouette, who is winning, and the anxious smile on the face of the flute-player, who is losing.

And M. Pierrotte? . . . Oh, M. Pierrotte is not far away either. He is there, in the window recess, half hidden by the wide yellow curtain, applying himself silently to an absorbing and laborious task. A low table stands before him: he has placed on it compasses, pencils, rulers, squares, China ink, brushes, and finally, a long placard of drawing paper that he is covering with queer signs. He appears to be pleased with his work. Every five minutes he lifts his head, inclines it slightly to one side and smiles complacently at his handiwork. What might this mysterious work be?

Just wait: we are going to see it . . . Pierrotte has finished. He leaves his hiding place and creeps behind Camille and little Thingummy; then all of a sudden he displays his big placard before their eyes and says:

"Look! how do you like this, young couple?"

Two exclamations answer him:

"Oh, Papa!"

"Oh, Monsieur Pierrotte!"

"What has happened? what is it?" asks the blind lady, starting up from her dozing.

And Pierrotte replies cheerfully:

"You want to know what it is, Madame Eysette? It is . . . I may well say so . . . It is the plan of the new signboard we are going

to put up on the shop in a few months' time. Go on, Master Daniel, read it out aloud, so that we can hear how it sounds."

Deep in his heart little Thingummy sheds a last tear over his blue butterflies. Then he takes the placard in both hands—"Now, little Thingummy, be a man!"—and in a loud and steady voice he reads the signboard on which his future is written in letters one foot high:

CHINA AND CRYSTALWARE

EYSETTE AND PIERROTTE

*Successors to Lalouette*













